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FRANCESCO CLEMENTE by Jeanette Montgomery

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AVANT APRÈS

Mark E. Smith

The Fall

THE first god; had hung in his garden, from the back, looked like a household pet—but when it twirled round was revealed to be a 3 legged black grey hog.
THE second god, lived by fountains that flowed, by the blue shiny lit roads. Had forgot, what others still tried to grasp. HE knew the evil of the 'phone, the bells stopped on Sunday when he rose.

The slightly crazed pen of **Mark E. Smith** has once again led the mouldering vehicle of **The Fall** into unmapped wildernesses of pagan myths and twentieth century paranoia. **'Perverted By Language'** is probably the best Fall album to date. **The Fall** will not compromise.
This release is part of a barrage of **Rough Trade** material that CBS have released in Australia - the other album to inspire is the first release from **The Smiths** whose single **'This Charming Man'** is a small masterpiece!

TOUCH

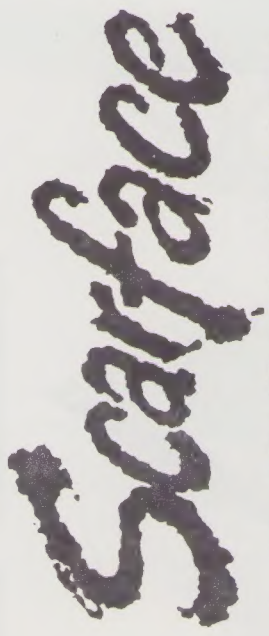
'The Myth Of Exoticism' (as Roland Barthes called it) still remains a powerful hold on the imagination. It portrays a fantastic world at turns savage, pure, simple and magical, which once discovered may be forever retraced and reconquered, its contents removed and then converted into style. In the West this myth is demonstrated by the moniker of 'tribe' given to any human group whatever its composition, so long as it displays the colour and aggression we imagine constitutes 'tribalism'.
Touch remains, next to *The Face*, the most exciting innovation in the concept of 'magazines'. It is also the only cassette-magazine to be wholly successful. The latest issue is Travel and captures - through words, visuals and sounds - the romantic exoticism of the concept of travel. **Touch** would be difficult to describe and hard to recommend too highly. Write to **Touch**, 83 George St. London W1.

A letter from Dreamflesh:

CARGO, ***the fifth DREAMFLESH magazine, more*** **miniature** ***than macro, (are humans destined to wander theoryless forever?). A small receiving dish; sending out satellites more frequently (bi-monthly, bi-literal, bi-lingual). Small, light, fast, this issue contains the terminal Harlan*** **ELLISON** ***interview, disguised as a map of Los Angeles; New-Hoodoo notes from*** **NEW YORK;** ***"Scientist on Safari" - A bio-abstraction on Charles*** **FORT** ***the man who said: "Whoever said the pen is mightier than the*** **SWORD** ***forgot the scissors"; China Watcher Stared Down In Hangzhou; Architecture For a New*** **PLANET;** ***Inner Space Blibliofix... a pattern of destruction as their maps*** **DISINTEGRATE** ***under their feet; Arab Stories and the JAPanese page... My God! only $2.00, P.O. Box 427 Leichhardt, NSW, 2040.***

The villa was abandoned in the middle of the night. We had no trouble stealing a boat, reaching an obscure point on the coast and burning the vessel with the aid of two drums of petrol we had taken from the garage in the villa. Simone left me concealed in the wood, she only came back at nightfall, but driving a magnificent automobile .....

Michael Trudgeon fails to acknowledge the source of his 'statement'-Georges Bataille's *Story of the Eye*-but the romantic style of the passage is not untypical of many of the architects involved in ARCHITECTURE AS IDEA, the latest entrepreneurial effort from enfants terribles BUILT MODERNE. Twenty-six architects are involved in the show, including Trudgeon, Built Moderne (Dael Evans, Randal Marsh and Roger Wood), Peter Corrigan (see interview in this issue), Norman Day and Ian McDougall.
RMIT Gallery, 342 Swanston St. Melbourne. March 5 - 23.



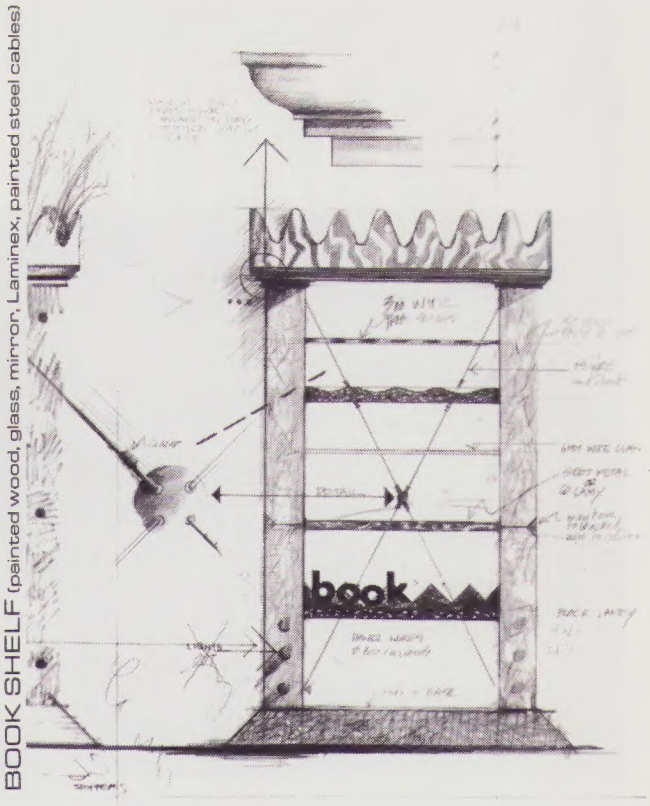
SCARFACE—THE AMERICAN DREAM

In the spring of 1980, under intense pressure from the United States, Cuba opened its port of Mariel Harbor, and thousands set sail for America. They came in search of the American Dream. One of them found it. His passion twisted that dream into an obsession. That obsession built an empire in a country where free enterprise can be the deadliest weapon of all.
Al Pacino is Scarface; a cold maniacal Cuban cocaine king in what has been dismissed as a gratuitously violent and bloody film. However to dismiss Scarface in that way would be to ignore the powerful direction of **Brian DePalma** and the brilliant acting skills of Pacino. There is also the gruesome reality of the contemporary cocaine industry which, as the film powerfully points out, is just another aspect of the American dream; 'Gone crazy a little bit, but still the American dream' says DePalma.

STOOL-CHAIRS (imported steel and wood, calf skin, copper, fake snake)

DAEL EVANS

"Compositionally complex, comic and pagan. Definitive theories and misled notions of regionalism are out the window."



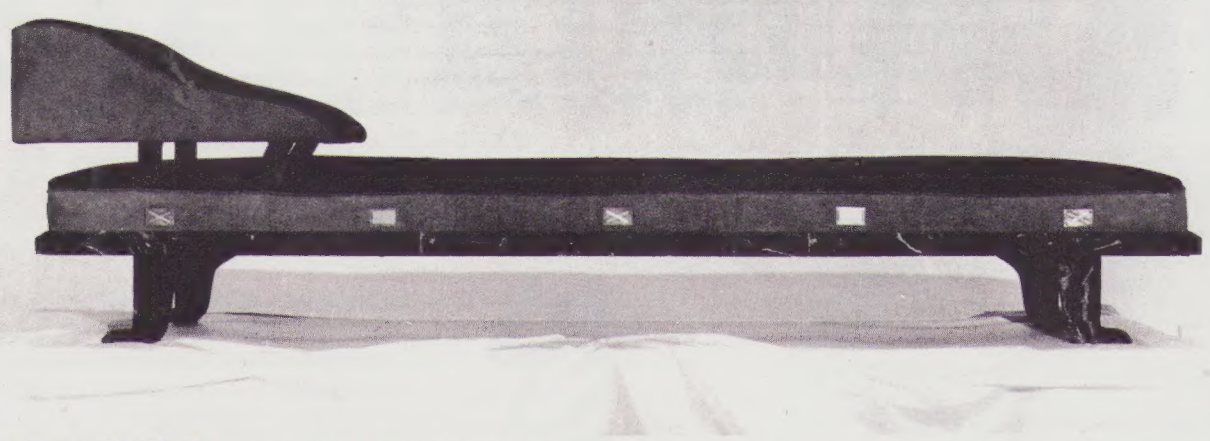
BOOK SHELF (painted wood, glass, mirror, Laminex, painted steel cables)

FURNITURE X-

BUILT MODERNE (comprising Dael Evans, Roger Wood, Randal Marsh) entrepreneured and staged FURNITURE X-HIBITION 1983 in an attempt to promote Australian designed furniture.

The exhibition challenges the common myth of "import quality". Ubiquitous beige, good taste interior design shops, current nostalgia-historicism and mindless commercial proliferation (Ba Ba Saba) act as points of departure. The latter "commerciality" being a position we long to occupy.

The twenty-one pieces designed by BUILT MODERNE and JANE JOYCE are inspired by a heterogeneity of disciplines;



CHAISE LONGUE (marble, suede, sterling silver)

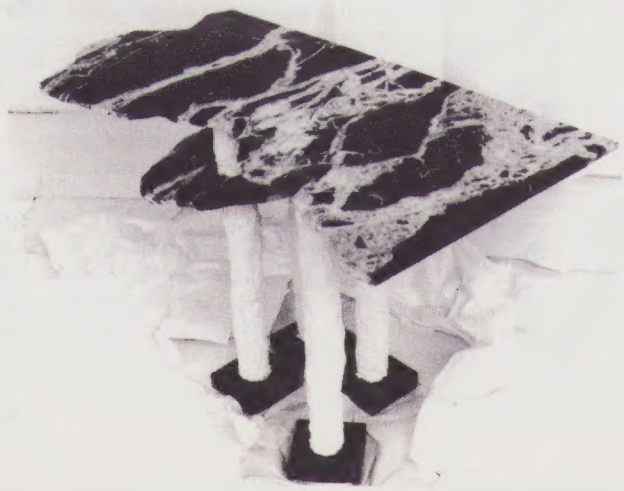
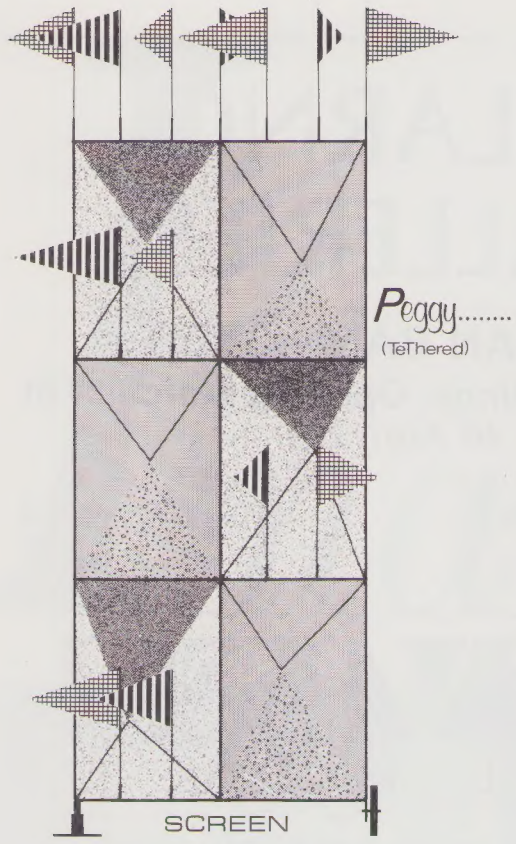


TABLE
(black marble top,
plaster legs,
black granite bases)

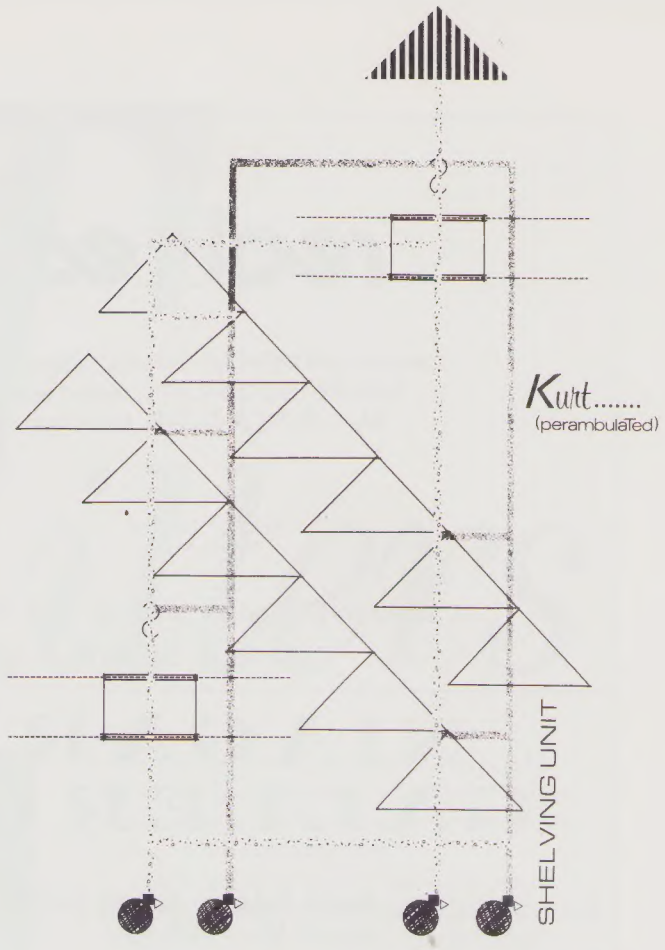
RANDAL MARSH

Precious illusions of grandeur.



JANE JOYCE

Industrially cheerful, made of chromed steel, stainless steel, anodised wire and sheet iron, the furniture is intended to be challenging, useful and yet amusing.



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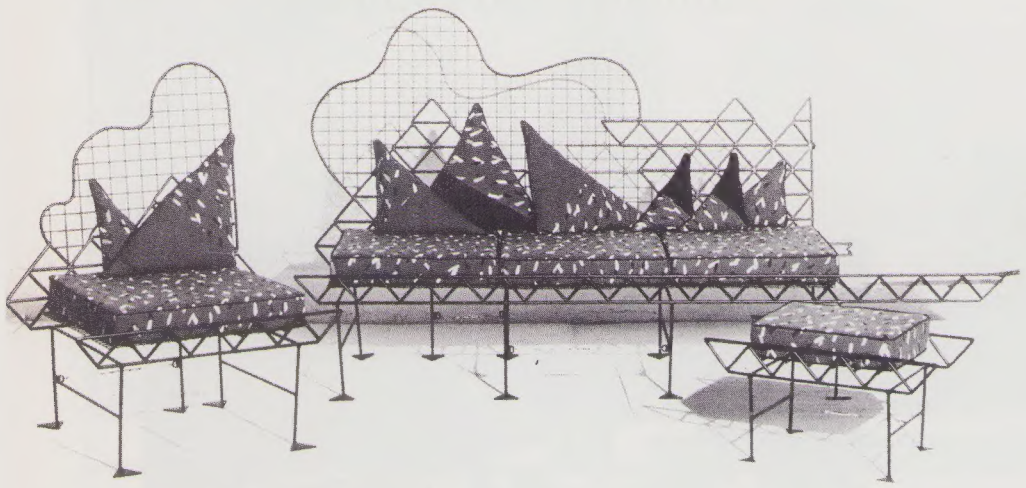
BUILT MODERNE.



CHAIR, SOFA, OTTOMAN (painted steel, printed fabric, cables and copper)

STOOL (powderkoted steel, cables, printed fabric)

ROGER WOOD

Black steel and copper constructions. Eroded and humorous.

realities

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April: PETER CORLETT, recent work.
May: VICTOR RUBIN, paintings.

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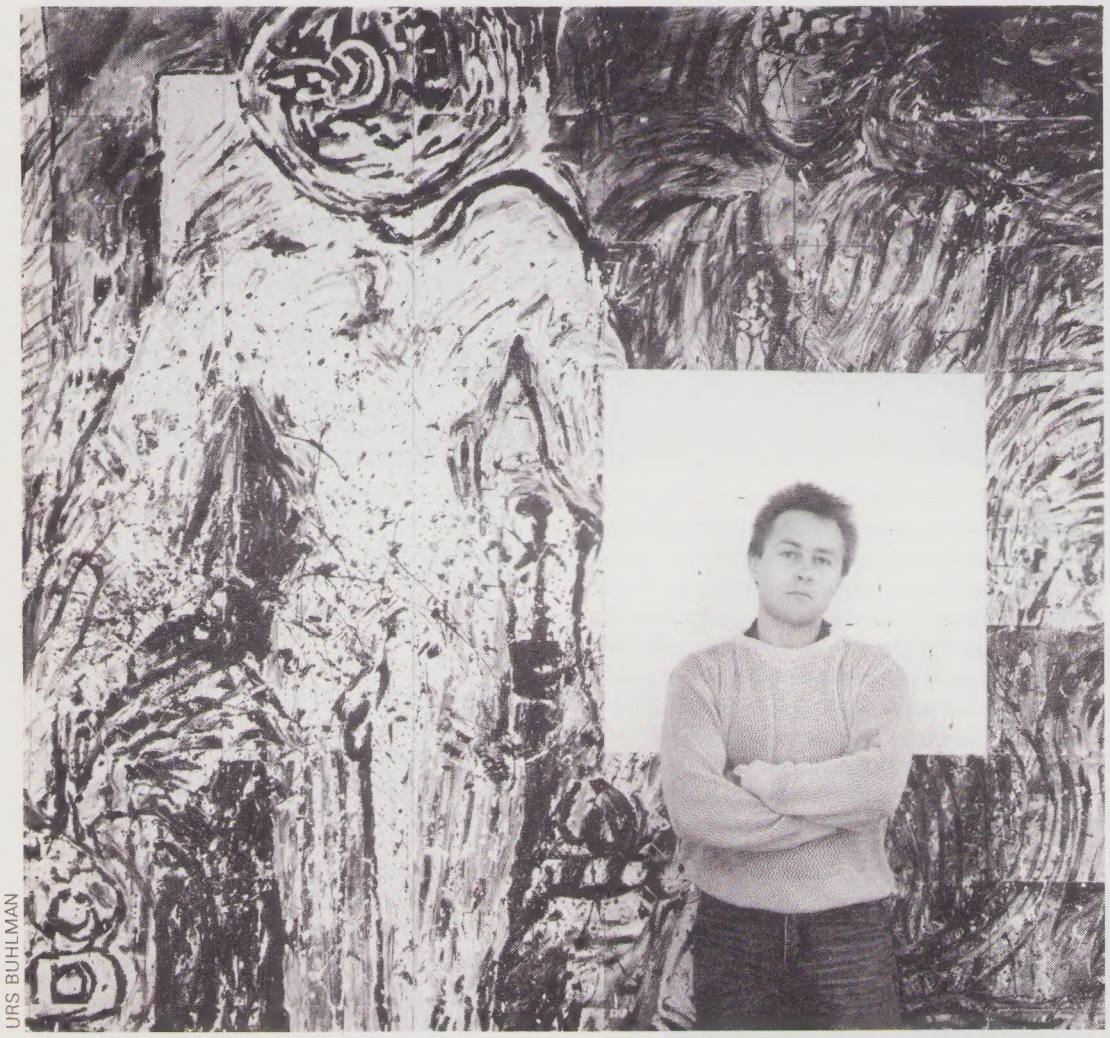
Imants Tillers



URS BUHLMAN

IMANTS TILLERS

INTERVIEWED
BY
ASHLEY
CRAWFORD

A RECENT SEMINAR IN PARIS CHAIRED BY Claude Levi-Strauss concerned itself with French and Australian art and anthropology. The forum included a number of Australians, both Aboriginal and white who came to term themselves White Aborigines or Black Aborigines.

Imants Tillers has observed that there appears to be an "emergence of 'aboriginality'... as a ubiquitous quality which is no longer the exclusive domain of 'black' aborigines." (Imants Tillers; Locality Fails. *Art & Text*, Winter 1983.)

Tillers has also argued that there is, at this point in time, no white Australian who could be described as a 'White Aborigine'; however how would one define such an individual? It could supposedly be argued that a white man would be unconscious of his Aboriginality – so how would such a condition be expressed?

Could Imants Tillers, with his quotation of European painters, be running parallel to the black Aboriginals incorporating Western/European clothing and language into his own culture?

Could Imants Tillers be one of the first of the White Aborigines?

BORN IN SYDNEY IN 1950 OF LATVIAN PARENTS, Tillers work has called into question many of the historical concerns of image making.

Using dozens of small ready-made canvases for each work, Tillers disputes the artist's method of working at every step – each painting is made up of little segments on the physical level as well as the conceptual.

"Each painting is a totally new proposition and I am aiming at greater and greater diversity, there are a couple of paintings using coloured panels," he says, referring to works in recent show at Reconnaissance Gallery, Melbourne.

"Two paintings are quoting Enzo Cucchi and Sandro Chia from a detail in the Zeitgeist catalogue and the reason I chose that image was that the artists are using a similar colour scheme to mine and also the type of expression in the painting seemed appropriate to what I was trying to do – I also want to do some Pollock paintings, especially his last images which are semi-figurative.

"I'm going to keep on working on the same size boards and the same format.

"Each painting has a different set of problems. For instance *Das Napoleonspiel*; I started off with the painting underneath which was from a De Chirico painting, *Horses On A Beach*. And then an Arakawa painting over the top, which is all of those intersecting lines – but it wasn't a matter of just super-imposing them over each other – somehow I had to make them fit into each other."

You have moved from the area of quoting Latvian comic books, elements of which are still evident in *Das Napoleonspiel*, to the quotation of your international contemporaries, such as Cucchi.

"It is a degree of confidence I suppose, and the sources of quotation can be quite random – there are no restrictions. One can choose from contemporary artists that one likes or one can choose archaic images that one likes but there is no problem in quoting Cucchi or Chia."

Why have you chosen to work with elements of quotation and what is the element you search for when you choose a subject for appropriation?

"With all of the paintings that I am interested in there is a certain amount of intensity, which doesn't necessarily just come from the image itself but which comes from the way that it is done. Quoting existing images is a way of the painting having an image that you see but the image itself is just a vehicle for other sorts of intensities."

Can those intensities cross over – can you be talking about the same feelings that Cucchi is talking about?

"Not necessarily, but I am sort of attracted to the image to begin with. But if you compare my paintings to reproductions of the original, my painting is still quite different."

In the past Tillers has worked from grids, enlarging the comic book illustrations or De Chirico reproductions with painstaking care. With the last of his new works he has moved to free-hand work.

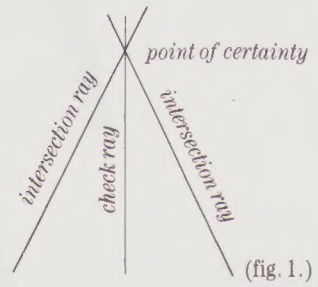
In some respects there are similarities here with the work of Juan Davila who also works with the quotation of other artists' work. Like Tillers, Davila is working with the perception of dispossession although coming from a Chilean background while Tillers works from a Latvian. White Aborigines both, perhaps, their choice of quotations ranging across art history.

Tillers in his latest show has used images from Chia, Cucchi, Whiteley, Schnabel, a still from Paul Cox's film Man Of Flowers, the techniques of the Aboriginal Papunya tribe and his traditional Latvian comic books.

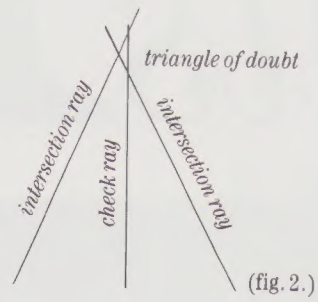
IN HIS ARTICLE "LOCALITY FAILS" TILLERS discusses the concept of Bell's Theorem, a concept which places in dispute the concept of the principle of local cause, or the statistical predictions of quantum theory. This projects the 'irrational' aspects of sub-atomic phenomena into the macroscopic domain. This suggests the transmission of unconscious information over geographical space.

Tillers suggests as a theoretical example of this concept the possibility that Bocklin's painting *The Island Of The Dead* painted in Munich in 1880 was executed as a delayed reaction to the extermination of the Tasmanian Aborigines by white settlers which was completed with the death of Truganini in 1876.

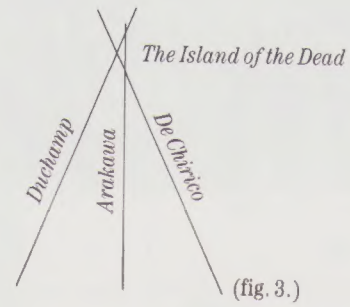
(*Notes on Art Practice*, Melbourne 1982)



(fig. 1.)



(fig. 2.)



(fig. 3.)

According to Bell's Theorem;
"... the conversion of potentialities into actualities cannot proceed on the basis of locally available information. If one accepts the usual ideas about how information propagates through time and space, then Bell's Theorem shows that the macroscopic responses cannot be independent of far-away causes." – Henry Stapp, "S-Matrix Interpretation of Quantum Theory", *Physical Review*, 1971.

Zeitgeist Painting, synthetic polymer paint on 64 canvas boards, 1983

IMANTS, COULD YOUR QUOTATION OF ARTISTS from around the world work within that concept of transmission?

"That's quite a good point actually. I hadn't thought of that in relation to my work but in fact, although the choice appears to be random of the images, perhaps they are related.

"Although if you look at my Cucchi, I feel that what I am trying to do is not so closely related to him – I see myself in a situation sort of 'post' these people, although I haven't clarified that idea.

"In Australia one of the big advantages is being such a distance from where this work is being done so one can do a Cucchi or Chia whereas if one were in New York possibly one couldn't do that because it would fit into a different area like Sherrie Levine which I'm not into at all. She's moved into Egon Schiel and sort of expressionistic looking images as well as Walker Evans." (See Douglas Crimp, 'Appropriating Appropriation', *Tension 2*.)

Do the ideas expressed in your essay on the Bell's Theorem tie into the work of Levine and Cindy Sherman, or into your own work – you are all dabbling in ideas of quotation and in effect the Theorem suggest a quotation of intangibles over geographical space through a macroscopic process. Isn't what you are doing a more obvious tangent of the occurrence?

"I don't know, I've never considered that theory in the terms of my own work. When I used it in that essay it was more to just suggest the possibilities of other... another system of interpretation. But what you mentioned, that my working method might relate to those ideas I think is great and quite possibly true."

That theorem is more or less a logical explanation, through macroscopic science, of those things that have always been feared or respected, terms like spirituality.

"Yes, actually the way the paintings sort of arise, I've been thinking about that as well, because now I am working completely from *feeling* – a particular painting is only possible at a particular time. I don't have a pre-planned set of images that I could do. I'll work on one painting until I can finish it, even if it takes me a month and the next takes half that time – but it's not a conscious decision to be meticulous about one, it is more a necessity about how the image turns out."

Much of your writing in such journals as *Art & Text* appears to be concerned with what could be considered more traditional concepts of the problems of art such as intensity and expression, although very much clothed in academic language. Are those your concerns as a painter as well as a critic or writer?

"I think the problems with those areas are particularly the terms used, or the connotations of the words that are used to describe them. In a way it is easier to talk in terms of intensities for me, spiritual concerns have a particular, almost cliched meaning or connotation attached to them. I am interested in those aspects and they've always been important aspects in art. Part of it, I think, is finding a new image that suggests those things and with that comes a new language to describe it.

"In fact if you read criticism that relates to a different sort of painting, for instance I recently read the essays in the field catalogue from 1968 and in a way the language there I find incomprehensible – I recognise some of the ways that the text relates to the images, but it is as if the people of that time learnt to speak in that way in order to reinforce that sort of painting. For

someone who hasn't been educated through the images and the texts it is quite incomprehensible."

There has in fact developed an essentially 'post-modernist' style of writing in recent years that includes people like Douglas Crimp, Carter Ratcliff, Germano Celant.

"Yes, I suppose that what I am saying is that with every new visual language there has to be a different form in written language to go with it. It would be difficult to describe this painting in the language of the Field catalogue."

And is it necessary to establish a discourse on the work?

"No, I don't think that that is important. I am more interested in the effect of the work, the direct effect from the viewer."

There has been a sudden resurgence in interest in the concepts of aboriginality and painters like Tim Johnson in Sydney. Has this influenced your work or attitudes?

"I'm not sure how it was that I became interested in that area. I had seen the Papunya paintings in Perspecta and they were fantastic and those painters are extremely interesting because in a sense they are isolated. In a sense they are like an artist with my background – they are displaced from their original culture, they live in a settlement, they are no longer nomadic and they are displaced from the mainstream of Australian culture as well. Hence they are in the same kind of limbo as someone like me whose background is Latvian, displaced in that context, and doesn't feel . . . it's a difference of degree but it is the same process. And in that sense I think their work is very contemporary and it shares many elements with contemporary artists.

"Tim Johnson considers them very contemporary as well. They are developing, the artists there are prepared to try and use things, it's not a matter of re-iterating the same traditional stories or whatever and I think that's something that's not widely recognised – that it is developing in the same way that 'our' art is developing. It's not traditional at all in that sense.

"With me it is not actually a matter of being influenced by Aboriginal work, it is more a matter of referring to the discussion or the problem of Aboriginal work – I'm not really interested in being influenced by it, so any elements in my work are really a sign for aboriginality, drawing attention to an Aboriginal aspect rather than wanting to incorporate it into my work."

A term that has come into popular usage at the present moment is that of 'White Aborigine' which was originated, I believe, by Paul Taylor in his Popism catalogue essay. What significance do you see that term as having.

"I believe he used the term as a sort of metaphor, for Popism artists in that they were like aborigines – nomadic, living on the fringes of society.

"I found that an interesting metaphor, but one can take a metaphor and if one thinks about it for a period it attains aspects of fact, it will blend with fact."

I was surprised to see the red classical pillars in one of your paintings, a great number of younger artists appear to be referring to a romanticism based on historical symbolism. I was thinking of Tony Clark and Vivienne Shark LeWitt specifically.

"In a way, by referring to past epochs or ruins, what one does in a sense is cross that gulf between now and then. By quoting those objects you are lamenting your distance from them rather than appropriating them."

Is this a nostalgia for naivety?

"Perhaps it is more a dissatisfaction with the present. My impulse with the work has always been when something becomes comprehensible in a particular way of working or whatever I automatically shift away from that position, and I think that is really necessary.

"With the work I am planning at the moment, for instance, I want to refer to local artists as well, I'm going to do a Marina Abromovic/Ulay painting but on the other hand I also want to do some cubist paintings as well, the analytical cubist work, which is sort of flattened and looks as though it is panelled in a way they always refer, or they interact with the way they are constructed. With some panels the image always flows in and out of its structure and it creates discontinuities.

"I'm also interested in the way the panels are made and the way they stack – the fact that the paintings don't exist once they're taken off the wall, it's as though the image is sort of precarious, it goes in and out of existence."

This would relate to more contemporary technologically based forms of media such as television or cinema which can be switched on and then off again and can be transferred with ease, needing only the space of a wall or a screen to come to life again.

"Yes, that's great, I think that's very much an aspect of it.

"In fact when they are stacked, the paint has run over the edges slightly so that a painting stacked would be an entity when you viewed it from

the side which would be quite different from another one stacked."

Imants, there seems to have been a massive amount of activity recently in the Sydney art world with the establishment of magazines like *On The Beach* and *Kerb Your Dog* and group shows like The Life Of Energies. You have been involved with all of these projects which seem to be aiming to establish a 'movement' not dissimilar to what became known as the Popism set in Melbourne.

Yet the basic values of this group would appear to be more traditional, concerned with traditional roles of the artist as transmitter of an emotive energy. John Young in his introduction to the Life Of Energies catalogue writes 'The cultivation of energies "at that unbearable point where the mind touches matter and lives its every intensity, consumes it." '

"I think any show does that, look at Popism, and once the show has done that those sorts of connections between people no longer exist – or they only exist in the minds of the people who saw the show.

"With The Life Of Energies show, what I found interesting about that was the way the work was installed – one work was quite different in nature from another and it was if the criteria was not what the work looked like, it was the degree of intensity or something. For instance the Tim Johnson painting was quite small, my work was quite large and overbearing. Carole Roberts had tiny little interiors. Marianne Ballieu had the table installation, so from one work to another there was quite a large jump in terms of the way it looked."

It is perhaps interesting to contrast the theoretical importance of the Popism exhibition with The Life Of Energies, it is perhaps like the contrast between cubists and expressionists?

"Although Expressionist work looked more or less the same. Visibility has become an important aspect, for me these works are created to be extremely visible, dominating. That seems to be one option one can take at the moment and the other seems to almost be invisibility and I think those two poles are somehow related to each other."

In 1982 in the Art Projects publication *Notes On Art Practice*, Tillers put forward a somewhat explanatory theorem in regards to his influences and sources of quotation. He talked of the Triangle Of Doubt which 'expresses the failure of desire (or overt intent) but at the same time represents an expansion of possibility and knowledge'.

"Well I think the idea of the triangle of doubt has to do with the mental processes – when one aims at a certain point in one's thoughts, or a particular goal, if you reach that goal, that is the point of certainty, but if you aim for that particular point and by aiming you end up somewhere else. That is the triangle of doubt."

'Personal strategies and systems, devised in order to attain a point of certainty *(fig. 1) seem inexplicably bound to fail. The desired unambiguous 'point' expands into an 'area' of concern – the* triangle of doubt. *(fig. 2)*

"It has to do with the relation of the conscious to the unconscious – you have a conscious desire to go in a particular direction, and if you reach that it's fine, but I am interested in the idea of setting up a point that you are moving towards so that you get to a completely different point. It is like choosing the Cucchi as the direction but then in the process of doing that the work becomes something else. It's not just the image. I think the method of working is very important from one painting to the next one is searching for an even more effective way of working.

'The major influences on my work over the last 10 years include the 'Given' in Duchamp, Arakawa's 'mistakes' and the 'precise variations' of De Chirico's later work. These three 'lines of influence' (moving in the direction of melancholy) seem to converge on a single point (Bocklin's painting 'The Island Of The Dead') (fig. 3). The importance of Munich cannot be underestimated. I am now totally preoccupied with this realisation.

"If you look at these paintings, it is very easy for me to imagine them without any image at all, the image is almost a chance configuration . . ." ●

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THE PROBLEMS OF APPROPRIATION

'The overall effect of our culture is that it tries to destroy theirs.'

TIM JOHNSON

BY INGRID PERIZ

The interesting thing about the paintings (from Papunya and Yuendumu)... is that they appear to look into the traditions and the aesthetics of both late minimal and post-modernist art. (Kenneth Coutts-Smith, *Art Network*, 7, p.54)

To me, Papunya paintings are unique in the world in that they derive from a forty thousand year tradition but supersede modernism. (Tim Johnson, in interview.)

Is the domain of the aesthetic the last site of appropriation?

Tim Johnson is a former conceptualist artist who has been making visits to the the Papunya area of the Central desert since the mid seventies. During these visits Johnson has observed and worked with Aboriginal artists. Through his publicity work for the Papunya artists, the curation of the 'Papunya Tula: Aboriginal Art Of The Western Desert' show at Macquarie Univesity, the course on Aboriginal art he conducts at Sydney College of the Arts and his own work he has done much to contribute to the recent critical acclaim accorded the Papunya paintings. Excerpts from a recent interview follow:

Would an adequate description of your more recent works be the depiction of Papunya[1] artists in the process of producing their work?

Yes.

Is it as simple as that?

It is really, although since then I have started to put some of their characteristics in my work. I had a painting with some Papunya painters and their work and I decided to make their paintings my paintings and to put them in their work. The new thing was having the painting inside the painting and having it be a copy. The idea of art about art is something I got from conceptual art, the artist making art about the language of art. I've been trying to develop my own language and I found that a bit difficult so I sort of parodied it, using someone else painting who already had a language.

And so now you have begun to adopt some of the Papunya language?

Yes, some of it, but I couldn't adopt some of the symbolism because it has a specific meaning.

Did the development of the dot-screen technique, what Imants Tillers has called 'the image of dematerialisation'[2], arise from the need to retain some elements of sacredness?

Yes, originally most of the imagery in that visual culture was sacred. I don't know how much of the Papunya imagery is still sacred. The aboriginals are using symbols which pre-date our culture by thirty to forty thousand years. They pre-date early western figurative cave drawings with an abstract imagery using form as a language. Its rebirth in the twentieth century is at a time when western abstract painting had turned into 'pure' abstraction without any specific meaning. To me, Papunya paintings are unique in the world in that they derive from a forty thousand year tradition but supersede modernism.

In the catalogue to The Life of Energies exhibition, John Young wrote that your work was 'not simply that of a detached anthropological interest based on appropriation but rather that of becoming an aboriginal'[3]. Would you care to comment?

I would really like to be able to paint Papunya paintings, but I would probably need to be initiated.

Your most recent work is derived from ancient Buddhist cave paintings, 'dematerialising' through the Papunya dot-screen. Is this a departure from previous concerns?

It relates to the Papunya work in that the imagery has been conceptualised. It's a super-imposition of a couple of different painting styles. I suppose it relates to someone like Imants Tillers' work in that the painting process has been mystified, the image is ambiguous. And it is a sacred image.

In the 1980 Boyer lecture, Bernard Smith spoke of the possibility of a cultural convergence. Is that something you are concerned with in your work?

I've found it helped me knowing the Aboriginals and seeing their work and I've found it's something that encourages this convergence. There is definitely that convergence and that ends up destroying the minority culture, although it needn't in this case; they may be clever enough to keep what they have inherited, from the whites. I always feel as though I'm appropriating things. It is such a fine line. But the overall effect of our culture is that it tries to destroy theirs.

Do you see what you're doing as contributing in any way to that destruction?

It does in the long term, I think all art does. It is like looking at copies of what we do.

My conversation with Tim Johnson raised certain problems; problems which were reinforced by recent discourses employing notions of aboriginality and the manner in which terms of critical appreciation of Papunya work have been couched. How accurate is a categorization of these works as 'post-conceptual'[1]? Is Papunya to be the latest element on a geneaology of an 'Australian' modernism; a construct which might run something like Preston-Olsen-Aspden-Papunya[2]; Can this work in fact be posited within a tradition of western art without a mis-representation of its significance within its own domain of reference?

> Popism, like the Aboriginal nomads, can therefore find a metaphor for itself in its existence on the surface and edges of the existing landscape.
> Paul Taylor, 'Popism, The Art of White Aboriginals', *Flash Art* (May 1983, p.50).

Johnson declined to comment when I asked him about this use of 'aboriginality', although he did concede that Taylor's of Aboriginals may have been slight. This may not be important, merely more polemic for an Australian art. What is significant is the way in which notions of aboriginality have been employed in this context as a metaphor for an aesthetic, an attitudinal stance of a particular body of work. This stance relies upon ideas of 'the surface', *on* the surface as opposed to *in* the landscape; a forsaking of 'depth' for an art of 'radical superficiality'[4]. How can a discourse about an art which 'proclaims itself an art without hidden meanings'[5] be constructed in terms of a perceived relationship of similarity with the 'Aboriginal nomads'? Is the use of Aboriginality in this context, a use which could perhaps betray a total misunderstanding of the nature of the relationship of the Aboriginals to the land, nothing more than an attempt to authenticate a body of art in terms of its 'Australian-ness'?

What is at stake in Johnson's parody, a parody of a strategy of camouflage? The masking of signification becomes the sign of a Popist sensibility. The dot-screen was an attempt by the Papunya artists to retain a private significance, one which may or may not be accessible to non-Aboriginals. Certainly, a particular type of meaning can be produced through a literal reading of the symbology. Exhibitions such as 'Papunya Tula: Aboriginal Art of the Western Desert'[6] include detailed explanations of symbolic references in their catalogues; a key to de-coding.

The paintings can be read as maps of ownership and lists of territorial rights as revealed through narrative. Like translation, the flavour is lost; inaccessible to the non-native. Its final significance cannot be grasped.

1. Such a blanket categorization 'papunya' does not acknowledge the diversity of individual artistic practices included in the term. Is the term 'Aboriginal' in fact an attempt to homogenize a variety of practices under a convenient label which both ignores the diversity of these practices and creates a bogus notion of 'pure' (artificially frozen) Aboriginality.
2. Tillers, Imants; 'Fear Of Texture', *Art & Text 10*, p.15.
3. Tillers, Imants; op. cit. p.16.
4. Taylor, Paul; *Flash Art*, May 1983, p.50.
5. Taylor, Paul; Introduction to the Popism catalogue, p.3, June, 1983.
6. Subtitled 'The Dawn Of Modern Art', Macquarie University Library, Oct. 13-Nov. 7, 1980.

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Francesco Clemente is an Italian painter living in New York City. He has risen to prominence in recent years as a major figure in what has become an international generation of painters that includes David Salle and Robert Longo from the US, Sandro Chia and Enzo Cucchi from Italy, Anselm Keifer and Helmut Middendorf from Germany and Dale Frank and Howard Arkley from Australia.

Francesco Clemente

Photo by Robert Mapplethorpe (detail).

Clemente recently had two simultaneous exhibitions at the Whitechapel and Anthony D'Offay Galleries in London. William Furlong, editor of Audio Arts magazine in England, spoke to Clemente about his work and the Transavantgarde. January , 1983.

Francesco, the elements in your work come from many sources, including early Italian/Christian art and faith as well as from pre-Christian and Pagan mythologies. From autobiography, symbolism and from the present – elements that were originally an integral part of a specific cultural consciousness and logic. You are in some respects functioning rather like an archeaologist except the subject of your study is the mind and the history of visual imagery and symbols. Is there a system of organisation and logic that you consciously use when re-combining these different visual elements and how does this process of organisation differ from the narrative as a method of communication.

Yes, there is a method, I imagine that my way of thinking is the method, just the way I think and the way I see and perceive things around me in daily life. The way I remember, the way I select. I do not hold very good conversation because I do forget most of what I see and what I hear and I remember only this very small collection of things which I find extremely meaningful in one way or another. This makes my conversation very boring but probably my work of art very interesting.

Analogy, coincidences in time between information that comes from different sources, time, commonplaces in conversation, common-

Rudo, 1981.

places in belief and behaviour – anything which looks banal and yet happens again and again in daily life. The body, this old idea of the body as a map of the universe, which is not unreasonable in that the body is the medium of the universe. The body is the medium of the environment and that's all there is, there is nothing else.

You talk about analogy and metaphor, so does the body become a metaphor for things about the world as you perceive it?

Analogy? When I think of analogy I think of . . . a metaphor is connected with a dichotomy, with two things, but analogy is connected with a chain of things. It is all important I think to think in terms of multiplicity and not of duality. So in that sense I am sympathetic with the pagan way of thinking whereas the monistic idea arises from the fact that everywhere there are millions of Gods, Gods are everywhere, so that it is actually *one*. This I realise is from the million, not from two, like from the Greek and Jewish tradition. The dominant tradition in Western civilisation, Christianity, arises from this duality, a dual way of thinking, whereas traditional Italian thinking, I realise, arises from the pagan tradition which is to do with multiplicity – multiples of suggestions and possibilities. And analogy has to do with something which appears in place of something else which appears in place of something else – the way knowledge works is like that, it is an explanation in place of another explanation in place of another explanation, so painting is a part of this explanation.

So the idea of duality almost conceals the fact that there is a much wider range of possibilities when it comes to experience of human expression.

Yes, it is very important to relate, to understand, it is important that whatever you are thinking about, you understand the relativity of it and the mobility of it and it is very important to establish a common feeling about how things flow continuously, how explanation and truth substitute one another and so how the valuable thinking now days is the thinking that is done around these terms of *changing*, of *adjusting*, of adjusting to a direction more than building a model of an order that we want to achieve, which is I think an origin of all the horrible things that are happening today.

I'm interested in the idea of building a model which is to do with multiplicity and it means I suppose, ultimately, that an enormous range of alternative ideas can enter art. Do you think of it in that way?

Yes, it means what art always meant, art was always a tool in a certain processive learning and was a good tool for good learning, meaning, when I say good I mean, when you are a child, you do not teach a child to cut himself, you teach a child to minimise the pain of whatever he does and the child learns that from the mother through a form of love which is very full of eroticism and art goes with that. Art is the medium of good learning.

The arts have always been that, an erotic medium for learning and this is what is missing with much learning, now more than ever because learning goes somehow around without this medium. I think this is no good.

Do you think that this is an alternative to the academic concept of learning which uses the printed word and the spoken word, which implies a sort of logic of thought which perhaps isn't very close to the way the mind works but also is not very close to the way in which an artist works when one describes the artists function as learning visually?

Yes, I think if somebody is out of his mind, it is not enough to talk to him – you have to embrace him and touch him. We read in the old books that the Spartan people were very violent and at war all the time and wanted to move around all the time. So someone invented a particular way of dancing and singing so they could be busy doing that and not killing each other all the time and it doesn't sound unreasonable to me that today we need a lot of music and dance and things to look at to keep ourselves busy in a harmless kind of way. On the other hand I don't see an opposition between this way and . . . What I believe is that the other way of learning, which is apparently logical, apparently more reasonable, I do not think that it is free from suggestions from the site of the symbolic. You know, the site of the symbolic imagination. If you look around the city you might also think that art is everywhere, but it is just 'bad' art – I mean traffic jams, whatever you don't like, it doesn't look reasonable to me, just like art and imagination but in a very . . .

Unconstructive?

Well, I might also like it, I don't want to say counterpose art and the collective imagination, I just want to say that the artist's thinking is a kind of thinking analogous to whatever else is around, the difference is that it is a minor-Italian thinking and it turns around other ways of thinking, other possibilities which are not just one, which are considerate to other ideas – not necessarily the right one, but what is important is that there is more than one possibility and one can carry along with as many as one can and that is all we can do, there is nothing else we can do than try and imagine many different ways and try and adjust to them. And I don't think that the one that wins out is necessarily right.

I think it is possible that an entire collectivity makes a complete mistake in the way of learning and thinking and moving and deciding.

That follows on to the next point really. Is your starting point for a painting, such as The Fourteen Stations that are currently being shown at the Whitechapel and those being shown here which are The Midnight Sun Cycle at the Anthony D'Offay Gallery – is the starting point for them an idea about a single experience that has no form other than in your mind, or is it a response to an episode or a story or narrative that existed before you decided to make the painting?

No, anything which comes from the past and connects with what I do is because of coincidence and shows the value of the tradition of art – the fact that you can start with your autobiography, and never go wrong. You're always bound in a collection of images which is six, seven, eight, nine thousand years old, this means that there is a basic knowledge and learning going on and you are into it and it is something very simple and you can relate to it just through your daily life and whatever narrative before what you do is just a confirmation and I can understand it only *after* I have done my narrative – then I can understand the old one, there are these continuous coincidences going on.

If I can just go back to the point I was making in the first question about the fact that in a sense what you are doing is about what an archaeologist does, but of course you go further because you reincorporate those elements into something else, i.e., one of your paintings. If you do take something from the past, from ancient history, it has two potencies, the one that it had in its original cultural setting and the other is the potency it has out of that setting juxtaposed with other elements. To what extent do you feel that you can work with that sort of potency that the thing had originally and how does it alter? How does the symbolic component of the image that you have removed from its historical setting, how does it function in your work?

They are very much like the frame of the picture as far as the manufacturing of the picture goes – the images have to do with an analogical train of thought which arises from basic experience. So the work of the past does not alter it dramatically, there is a division between what the living know and what the dead know and by confronting the two things you get the right information.

So in fact the starting point for the paintings is feeling about multiplicity, irony, analogy and not in any sense like the illustrator who is given a story and his task is actually to express the story visually – your paintings actually re-create the subject

matter of what they are about . . . they create *the subject matter.*

Yes, the story is really the opposite of the painting. The painting only has to do with that moment of the story that would make it remembered, the climax.

In fact talking about the stylistic quality of the paintings and knowing how different they were to the paintings you presented in October '81, it seems that you are also concerned with attempting to reinvent a formal language for the things that you want to paint about as well as being concerned with the content.

You can get the meaning of the phenomenon when the phenomenon is ended and so style is really like an artificial diet for a painter that helps you to guess the meaning of his work before the end and I find that an unfair way to play the game. I don't believe that you can do without the style, but the style should be readable only after, not during the work. And it is important that you preserve this kind of ignorance of the formal solution, of what makes a 'good' painting, that should just be a happy coincidence, that it is good. You cannot do the same thing again and again, it does not look like art, art to me is like the trees and the animals, they change all the time . . . a tree has a style, just in the way that he is himself, but you look at him every summer and he is different, he has a different kind of solution to survive the year.

So it is important that formalism and style do not become a prop or the subject of the painting, you are presumably much more interested in content.

I wouldn't make a division between the two – the structure of the work is good when there is a tension between the enormous limit you put and the enormous passion you want to put there anyway, beyond the limit. The peculiarity of being a painter is that you are alone and the moment that there is a style of your own it means that you are not alone, there are a group of people around you who say Yes! and it is very comfortable, but there is no magic in it, there is no interest in it, it is better to die – that is the way to real style, is to die. That is a solution that a lot of artists have found, to die once the work is done.

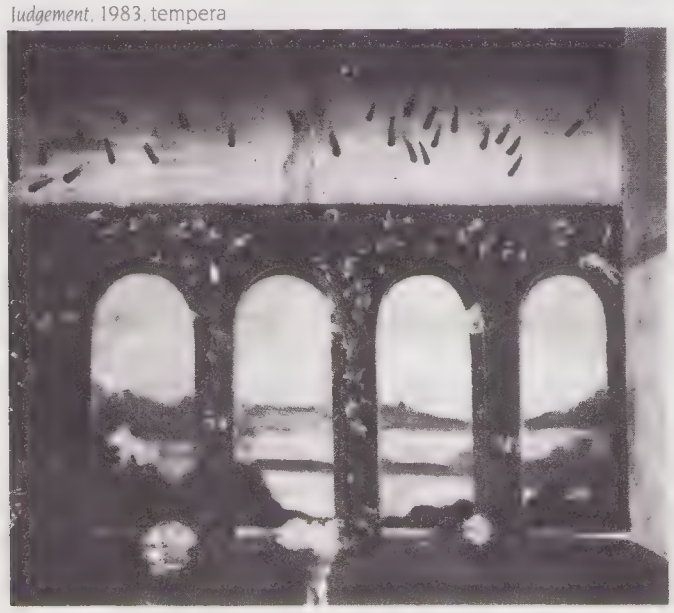
This tension that you talk about is very evident, between the content and the actual way it has been realised. I wonder if we could talk about the painting on our left that I believe the Tate Gallery will acquire. It is a white painting with three figures in the centre and a number of eyes juxtaposed around the surface in fairly thick white impasto.

Two blinded lovers, but only one of them is blinded while the other one looks somewhere else. We have five million pores in the skin and for the two lovers they work like five million eyes. The shape of sailing boats in the Renaissance tradition which is also the Medieval tradition and the Roman tradition – the tradition of symbols, they were almost like logos, like marks that gave a paradoxical statement about knowledge. So these eyes in the shape of sailing boats are in that tradition and the image does have this kind of contradiction because the idea of the sailing boat has an idea of speed and mobility and yet there is the idea of blindness in the painting.

The third figure comes about from a formal problem – the painting did not look good with only two people.

There is again an interest in human skin which is a predominant factor in the works, and also eroticism between the three figures.

Judgement, 1983, tempera



Painting No. III, 1981/2, encaustic

The Skin is a surface broken by holes and we do believe that through the holes we connect the interior space with the external space and every tradition of knowledge about integrity, about unity, about unity between our feelings and what happens around us starts with this recommendation to keep what is inside us inside and what is outside is to be kept outside. That is the start of every tradition of learning – or there is the opposite which is to let things flow and certain drugs make you think that whatever the brain thinks is as real as what happens outside, which is not usually the status with which we live where we consider what is outside to be real and the inside has an uncertain status of reality.

In your work you give priority to what you are feeling, making it an external reality.

It is a scientific fact, I read a report from a doctor in a mental hospital about a patient who was on drugs for a number of days and everyone around him perceived *him* as taller, so not only his perceptions were changed by the drugs but the perception that others around him had of him had changed.

Is there a difference between the paintings done in New York and those done in Italy?

There is a major distinction between these paintings and the ones at the Whitechapel. These ones were done in the summertime and in the open air and those are done in the wintertime and in the studio. In these I was blinded by the excessive light and in the others by the darkness.

The two current exhibitions in London are of works connected by a theme or a title, like the Stations and the Sun cycle. Why is it necessary to actually make a series of works based on an overall theme?

In both collections there is a multiplicity of suggestions and phenomenon going on, so one title does better justice to them all without giving too much of a direction to your reaction. I don't like pictures without a name, it's like a person without a name and in this case it is better to have a single name because it leaves each painting room to express itself.

When you call a group of paintings The Fourteen Stations, it pre-conditions to some extent the way people are going to look at that series of paintings given the historical fascination of artists with painting the crucifixion and the stations of the cross, are you using this expectation for a particular purpose?

The Fourteen Stations means travelling, stations reminds you of travelling, fourteen stations, reminds you of the time you are travelling which is the present. To find that you can go around and your travels are circular is the surprise, you always hope to travel from a worse situation to a better one, but you cannot find that happening in the paintings – there is no turning point, no starting point.

So the title is an analogy . . .

Yes, you can see how much weight this analogical connection has, just enough to relate to things in the easiest way.

You have said that images have an autonomy, the language of images is a logical, rational, positive way of thinking. Do you mean that images, just as human

behaviour, is a long way removed from methods of expression and communications as much as the organisation of the written and spoken word?

We change a lot all the time, but the skeleton of imagination is always the same. All through this century there has been this wonderful breaking of provinciality of thinking and knowing and learning so now there is this funny feeling that seems rather paradoxical; in one way a desire to be provincial again and on the other hand the place where you are is no longer the place that it was because you know that there is another place that is as important as yours. To be in your place means to find a skeleton of your place and to show it and see how similar it is to the skeleton of another place and then on top of that you can play and build all the games you want.

This is presumably very important to you because in October '81 you had an exhibition here and in one of the rooms there were fresco paintings that were made in Rome I believe and in another room there were large paper paintings made in Madras and now you have made a lot of oil paintings that were made in New York so you obviously see location as a very important factor in making your work.

Yes because unfortunately not all over the world is the liberality which permits an artist to express the truth of the place and the few people who have had that opportunity . . . being one of those artists I feel I want to do that with other places, I do not love only Berlin, I think I can be an artist in Southern India and New York and Italy with the same intensity.

I know that with each place you go the relationship will be different, how do you go about establishing that relationship? I know that you use materials that are related to the place but are there other factors?

I use materials in the widest sense – diet is a material too, the way you sit, the way you breathe, the expectations of the people around you, the light, the climate so we are back to the environment.

Which is very different to the idea of an artist merely chronicling or recording what he or she sees as they pass through a different country – I mean you actually base yourself in that location for a substantial amount of time, whether it by NY, Madras or Rome. The works in the earlier exhibition that I mentioned were fairly subdued and quiet while the paintings showing at the moment are very strident, gestural, expressionistic and in a sense one could say they are linked to younger artists in Italy, Germany and New York. Are you interested in that new gestural painting?

I am not really interested in the affectation of taste and in fact each collection of works of mine belong to a totally different connotation as far as taste goes.

Painting No. XII, 1981/2, oil and encaustic.

Something else you've mentioned in the past is the desire to make something out of an essentially dangerous basis and often the paintings look like they were quite a battle to paint and make work – it doesn't look as though they came about as the result of an easy process and I wondered how important those problems were to you?

It is not believed that a work of art is a necessity and no one knows of a formal solution to these problems so you can not be sure of a stylistic frame to work from. Anything that does not give the impression that it was a breakthrough then that is not art. It is very nice if a painting is pleasant, but you can't find out before you do it just how pleasant it is going to be. ● *(Thanks are due to Graeme Bartlett & 2JJ-FM Sydney)*

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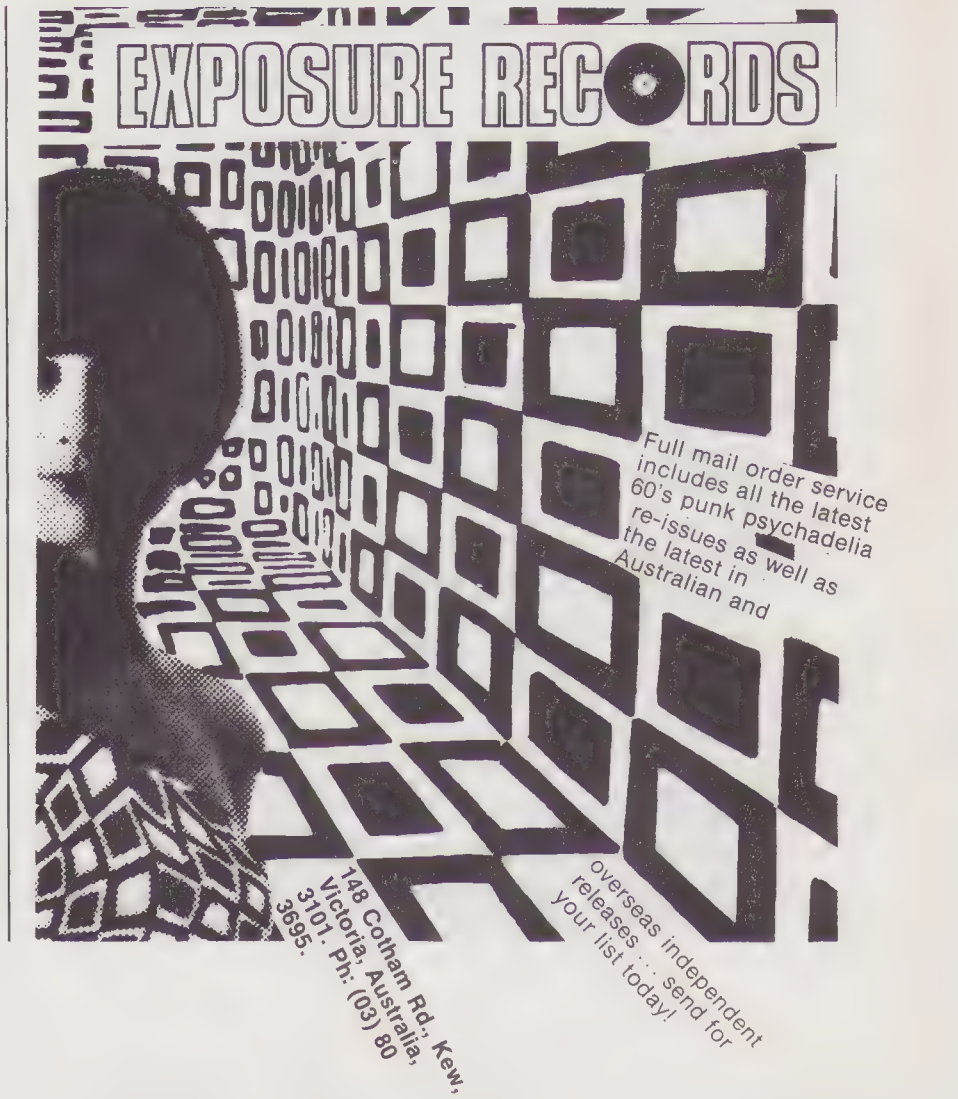
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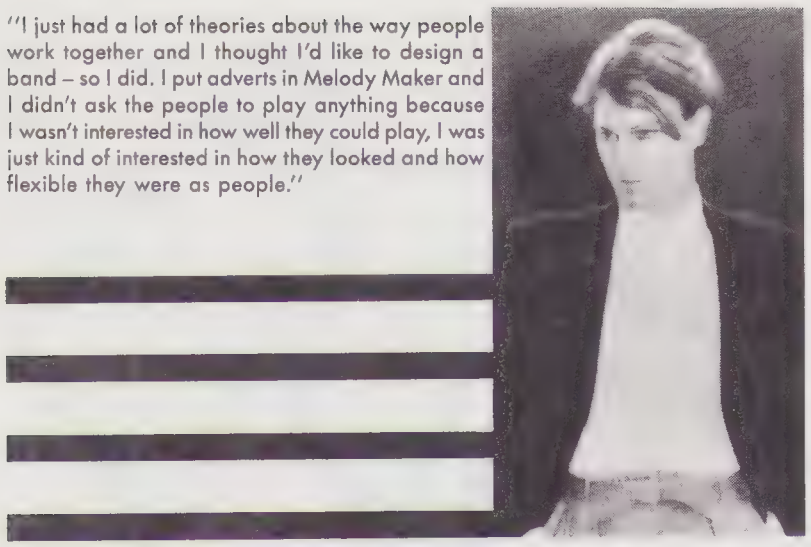
TENSION ABOUT MUSIC,
RELIGION & ROMANTICISM

By Ashley Crawford • We are walking down an avenue of huge trees. For over one hundred years they have stood there, with the trunks exuding the air of the pillars of a huge and ancient cathedral. I had met John Foxx only a short time ago in the steel and glass grandeur of an international hotel. It was a bustling and excited place for David Bowie was staying, and was at that moment passing through the lobby of the hotel. Amidst this bustle I was introduced to the quiet Englishman with his square jaw and keen eyes. As we walk beneath the trees Foxx sighs softly. He seems more at home beneath the security of the greenery. We talk about the English countryside, about art and the world of Joseph Turner – a world Foxx understands well. We talk of cassette magazines and artists and cities and religions and even Sigmund Freud. Over lunch we discuss steak and beer, music and books, Hitler



''I just had a lot of theories about the way people work together and I thought I'd like to design a band – so I did. I put adverts in Melody Maker and I didn't ask the people to play anything because I wasn't interested in how well they could play, I was just kind of interested in how they looked and how flexible they were as people.''

and Herman Hesse. The idea of a formalised interview seems alien after initiating John Foxx to Australian beer and sitting in the sun. John Foxx receives his first Australian suntan.

Foxx is an intriguing artist. He can be an inspired musician, a good – if flamboyant – writer and a painter with leanings towards both Romanticism and Surrealism.

Indeed, a touch of Romanticism tends to infuse everything John Foxx touches... as well as an element of the methodical, the technological, the scientific.

His first venture into music was Ultravox – a band created as a design concept as part of Foxx's studies in art. Despite the coldness achieved by Brian Eno's production and the wild punk style of the young Ultravox, the first album remains a romantic creation; the narcissism of English new-wave countered by the more timeless atmosphere of old England, an England of forests and ancient crumbling architecture.

Whether it is a post-apocalyptic Europe or a pre-Industrial Revolution Europe is irrelevant; but ivy tears at the walls and weather eats at the eyes of statues.

There is no great enigma about John Foxx. Asked whether the romantic element in his work is conscious he replies, ''Well, yes, because that is what I like – not like a box of chocolates which is a bit sickly, I like it when it is a bit bitter as well, a bit melancholy.''

The world of Foxx's second solo album, *The Garden*, exemplifies much of this with its post-apocalyptic or pre-historical imagery.

''I wanted to leave that open. If you want to see that in it you can do, but a lot of it is like that because I was walking and travelling a lot around Europe and you see what state it is in. There is all this talk of it being the next theatre of war, and I just thought what a stupid situation – most of what civilisation is based on is from that little area and now they're just using it as a disposable war scenario, which is somewhat obscene I think.''

In Foxx's Europe the decline has been gentle. Once grand buildings have had their contours softened by ivy and stained glass windows have a new glazing of greenery.

''That's the idea of it really, things just get changed around all the time and no matter what is established or what structures are built up, they get taken over eventually by something strong and new.

''And it is also interesting the way... I used to wander around London thinking how long would it take for nature to take this back over if everyone went. And it's not very long. It's a matter of months really and you would hardly know it was there after about twenty years – you would have a series of small hills that would represent what remained of all the buildings and everything would be in place again ready for the archaeologist to have a look at.''

But nature's meeting with man has irreversible effects such as the introduction of new species of animals.

''There were a few things like that in England, but it is difficult to judge. England's been constantly visited by forces that have done that over the centuries and made it what it is. England is nothing like England the way it was originally, even the animals are artificial in that sense. There's no such thing as a sheep in nature, or a cow – these are things that people have made, really. I think the logical end to these animals is some kind of big bulbous thing that gets fed on a conveyor belt and then chopped up after two years when it's attained the maximum size and it doesn't have a brain. That's virtually what has happened now and it will happen.

''I hope I'm not around when that kind of thing happens because I quite like the country side as it is, but what I'm trying to say is that that's no more artificial really – the countryside as it is compared with nature as it was. A cow couldn't really live without man.''

But, John Foxx agrees, it comes down to a matter of quality of life, ''Yes, I suppose at least the cow has a bit of fresh air before we ingest it.''

Foxx's calm figure is something of an oddity in the music industry, but it is an industry that he still sees himself as a part of ''Oh definitely, yeah, just to be practical, but it is almost an accident in my case.

''The scale of it is accidental because it was something I wanted to do as a piece of design at first, and then it just became popular, and then I realized that when something becomes popular in that way, in a cult way, that people actually take it to their heart. I felt very pleased about that, I felt that I ought to carry on doing it – because I liked it and other people liked it too – and that's the best situation you can be in. That gives you a kind of feeling of dignity and self respect.''

The original Ultravox was simply an extension of the design concepts Foxx was working on at college. ''Very much so,'' he says.

''I just had a lot of theories about the way people work together and I thought I'd like to design a band – so I did. I put adverts in Melody Maker and all that and I didn't ask any of the people to play anything because I wasn't interested in how well they could play, I was just kind of interested in how they looked and how flexible they were as people.'' Ironically the first album became a very influential album, produced by Brian Eno and packaged with very fashionable new wave/punk design credited to Denis Leigh – John Foxx's real name.

''It wasn't *obvious* to have Brian Eno doing it in those days,'' says John Foxx, ''He wasn't that fashionable. It was only later after he worked with Bowie that he became somewhat trendy. I liked him a lot then, because of what he'd done with Roxy and all that early era because I was a kid and I really enjoyed all that – it was the first really mysterious music that I'd heard apart from the Velvets and some Beatles stuff.''

The Beatles have re-surfaced as something of an influence on John Foxx's latest album, *The Golden Section*. It is an album somewhat lacking in the grandeur and romance of *The Garden*, but a more accessible record.

''If you widen things out you kind of learn more about what you are and what you're doing and if you are any good you want the music to reflect that, I think. Starting from *Metamatic*, *Metamatic* was when I wanted to strip everything away and be absolutely minimal and see what the absolutely minimal of anything was that you could do.

''It was all recorded on eight-track and a lot of tracks on that were recorded using only six track – which is pretty minimal for those days. In *The Garden* I deliberately wanted to make it more lush and incorporate things like nature that I liked and then this new one is meant to be a bit wider and it's got rock'n'roll as well. It's trying to look at things that are valuable although not necessarily novel – certain kinds of rock'n'roll that have been neglected for a long time, like The Beatles and certain ways of singing that haven't been used for twenty years.''

While *Metamatic* was an icy reflection of technology and *The Garden* a lush celebration of rotting grandeur and nature, *The Golden Section* is a reconciliation of both worlds with an added human element.

''It's also getting back to the *form* of music, because the other two albums were definitely not meant to be reproduced by any other means except through a record deck and *The Golden Section* was really meant to be playable live, because that's what I did with a lot of it. I did half the album in eight days – just by going into the studio and sweating a bit and having a good time.''

For all the difference between this and his previous albums, Foxx is happy with *The Golden Section*. ''I wouldn't put anything out unless I was happy with it y'know, I mean the amount of stuff I scrap is ridiculous – I scrap more than I put out in fact. I do things for experiment's sake, dozens of tracks that never see the light of day because I'm not happy with the way they turn out.''

Like the music, the packaging of *The Golden Section* is very straight-forward – unlike the elaborate booklet (*The Church*) and the classical design that accompanied *The Garden*. The writing in *The Church* is extremely grandiose and verbose but it is not, Foxx tells me, typical of his work or in the same style as his other current project, a book entitled *The Quiet Man*.

''That's a bit florid, *The Church*, but it was appropriate, I think, for what I was trying to write, lots of sections of it were quite minimal. *The Quiet Man* varies really, it changes a lot in style, that's the big problem with it, trying to reconcile all those bits into a comprehensive volume.

''*The Quiet Man* is like an everyman figure, he's a little man in a suit who is subjected to all the forces around him a bit like everybody is. We don't always understand what is happening to us but you still have to live through the times that you live in.

"*The Quiet Man* is like that, he's kind of the man without a voice and he is subjected to whatever happens around him. In some ways it's great because he doesn't get changed fundamentally by what happens to him, he's still the same man with a similar kind of humble approach to life.

"I think most of it is like "Systems of Romance No. 3" rather than like *The Church*, because *The Church* is like one episode in a dream where he breaks way, it's kind of a dream and yet not a dream – he breaks away from all the things that are suppressing him into this grey suited figure, the Englishman-type figure and he becomes very sensual for a little while and all his senses operate properly and it's very sad because all the way through the rest of the book he tries to recapture that.

"That scene happens actually when he's in a room in a city and he's on his bed at night and he keeps hearing this singing and it's very distant and he doesn't understand where it comes from and he looks underneath his bed and he finds a small door in the skirting board and he can't quite get through it. He saw the door when he was a kid when he *was* small enough to get through it and he didn't do it because he was frightened, and he tries to get through it now but he's too big of course. He can't get through so he looks through it and imagines what it's like through the door and that's the church sequence.

"I think it happens to most of us in one way or another..."

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I pass through many antique ecclesiastical foyers, ante-rooms and ornate restaurants among the pillars... Shady swimming pools and urinals of stone and fern and dark gothic ironwork, opening out into narrow cobbled streets with mossy stone baptismal fonts and intricately carved wooden pulpits covered in rambling vines. On every side there are glimpses of other floors, worn spiral stairways, galleries, deep lily pools, bridges and balconies.

I move effortlessly through many rooms... Down many corridors lined with fragments of gold icons and ancient paintings in tarnished gild frames... Worn flagged floors littered with dead leaves.

I remember glimpses of bathers in ferny stone pools. Dormitories with rows of sleeping figures. Strange allegories in the stained glass windows. Overgrown gardens, hazy riverbanks and ruined parklands seen from wrought iron balconies.

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"It is a big danger, ignoring your senses. There are a lot of terrible problems in growing up because I'm growing up like everybody else is and I find a lot of it very difficult.

"There is a section called *The Hidden Man* which is also one of the songs on the album which is about a young guy who's about thirteen, fourteen years old. He's walking through a park and he meets a guy, a man, who is older than he is and they talk for a bit and the young guy realises that he doesn't like this older guy at all, he thinks he has compromised everything possible – when you're fourteen, fifteen you're tremendously idealistic which is great, it's as it should be, and he thinks this man has really compromised and he walks away from him in disgust thinking, I just want to get away from this person.

"Then years later when he's older he's walking through a park and he meets a young guy and he realises that he's bumped into himself and he was the person he met."

This sounds ridiculously like a short story by Jorge Luis Borges.

"Yes, I like him, they're very circular stories and they're nice ideas because it inevitably does happen to you that when you're older you meet someone in the idealistic phase that you were in and they're disgusted with you. It's very healthy because it makes you re-evaluate who you are – I always check with the fifteen year old inside me, because we've all got him, am I doing alright so far? It's usually alright, so far it's okay.

"I never wanted to be one of these people who say I could've done this or I could've done that, because that's the most tragic statement, when you are in a situation and you say, ah, but I could have been this – but that's nonsense, you couldn't have because you *didn't* do it." Foxx advocates plowing ahead regardless of social attitudes, "Then you get tempered by that kind of experience.

"A lot of subtle things happen to you as you grow older, you realise people's motives more, that's the interesting thing – it's not always being the most wonderful person in the world that is important, what is important is understanding other people's motives and sympathising with them – I think that is the most valuable lesson you can learn because then you can forgive people things and you can be generous."

Foxx and I spent a great deal of time over lunch arguing about Christianity.

"What intrigues me about film is that it is the nearest thing to a dream state that you can get into in working life without chemicals, and I trust it far more than anything chemical because it stays and it takes a lot of intelligence and organisation. Human beings are organisational animals and when you organise something so well that it becomes magical that's when you have art."

Both ex-Catholics, we clashed over the value of many Christian attitudes, however Foxx points out that Christianity was originally a code of forgiveness as against the ritual of revenge that had dominated pre-Christ.

And yet his attitudes and love of nature fit more closely to more primitive and nature-based religions that dominated pre-Christian England.

"It is and it isn't – what I would like to do would be take all the structures of things that have been established because there are wonderful structures, like literacy which I think is a great way of transmitting experiences, which is magical in its own way, you know the code that you've established with a few marks on some bits of paper is magical – it can transmit so much by so little in such an elegant means of communication."

Foxx goes through life believing that if he is sincere and believes in what he is creating, then it will do well.

"There are lots of funny little axioms about that as well, like the more personal something is, often the more universal it is. It's strange how people have private little things that they're ashamed of and they imagine that no one else will understand that thing, and of course they do, millions of people do." People are too often ashamed of themselves, he says.

"That's one of the problems, Quentin Crisp is very funny about that, he was saying that if you have a social or sexual problem in this media age, the thing is not to do it in private, but to publicise it! Then you will make a profit.

"I used to draw him, y'know, at art school, he was our model."

Foxx has dabbled in most mediums, painting, writing and music especially – "All the ones that I find most satisfying are the ones that I can least live by, I love writing but I can't live by it because I can't do it everyday.

"I can only write when everything is just right, maybe one day every six months when I feel calm and collected and private and not about to be disturbed. Painting as well, because they are two private things that you can do when you're alone, you don't need a lot of resources really to do them and I think sometimes that you need to be in a calmer state of mind, I'm too exciteable at the moment because I get carried away and I've got lots of energy for which rock'n'roll is great because you can expend it wonderfully and elegantly, making a loud noise and sweating and dancing – which I do like doing.

"It's difficult to do that when you're writing a book or painting which are more to do with long periods of thought and concentration which I like as well, but I need to get rid of the energy thing first."

As a painter Foxx's ambitions are simple, he just wants to be good at it, "As a craftsman, and when you've got over that, which I think I have done because I've worked for years, I started drawing when I was six and I drew everyday, a lot until I started the band up, so I had twenty odd years of it – so as far as craftsmanship's concerned I can hold up with the best in some ways, in a modern way, probably not as good as the people in the Renaissance. I'm certainly not that good but I'd like to be.

"But that time's gone, it's finished, I'd be doing something inappropriate if I was trying to do that. But I can draw in a classical sense. In Renaissance times there weren't as many images around you so you had to draw what was around you and in order to possess it, which is what we want to do, they make an image of it – I think you always draw what you desire.

"What you want to have or you are intrigued by, you make a model of it that you can possess and that's why people value it so much, because it is a perfect model of something that you would love to have or love to be. That's why images are so important to modern life – they are models of ideal states or desirable states and that's why they become so sophisticated now because you have models of ideal sexuality like Marilyn Monroe or ideals

of youth like someone in Duran Duran. We're very good model makers – but we're not so good at the reality.''

Much of Foxx's artwork plays with this concept, using the format of collages.

''The thing about collages is that I thought it would be nice to get a lot of these models that have been made and look at them in different ways – a lot of them have nice shapes and good colours and when they're put together they look very strange and create lots of different tensions between them.

''It's like flicking pages over in any magazine but dreaming into it as well – you have that third thing of having a personal element and you dream into it, you fantasize. It's a lovely state to be in because I look through millions of books and magazines from everywhere and cut little bits out and then I deliberately suspend any kind of verval thinking and I go into a kind of nice state where – there's nothing esoteric about it – it's just a kind of non critical, or non verbal critical thing where you make choices based on instincts and feelings that don't have anything to do with words.

''Recently I had a sudden understanding of what oil painting is, because it's an outmoded thing now, and I just realised suddenly that it is a skill that is wonderful.

''It's all to do with illusionism as well because there isn't any third dimension in painting – you invent it by tricks like perspective. It's like stereo in records, it's artificial, there's no depth in there at all but you create it by means of echo and distance from the mike. It's fascinating what you can do with all that.

''When abstract expressionism and abstract thought came in it (perspective) was thought to be a con trick and people despised it. But that's not true, what it is is a convention, it's a context that is wonderful to acknowledge, it's like craftsmanship, it's like good carving or making beautiful buildings or enjoying nature or making a garden – what you do is acknowledge the faults in human perception and you make something wonderful out of it. So I think now, that if you want to be a modern artist you should perhaps do oil painting in the traditional sense, but do it beautifully and very skilfully.''

Many of Foxx's friends from art college have gone on to become recognised artists and illustrators, among them Sue Coe who has settled in New York to record that city's violence, and Russell Mills who has worked closely with Brian Eno, rendering the lyrics of the latter's songs visually.

''He's gone into abstractionism,'' laughs Foxx, ''which is very funny I think, because that's what he does best and he would think it was terrible because he could do it really easily, but I think he's come to terms with the fact that that's one of the best aspects of his work.''

Film is the one medium that John Foxx has not worked in, but is, he claims ''the most powerful medium around''.

''What intrigues me about it is that it is the nearest thing to a dream state that you can get into in working life without chemicals, and I trust that far more than anything chemical because it stays and it takes a lot of construction work to make it and therefore a lot of intelligence and organisation. Human beings are organisational animals and when you can organise something so well that it becomes magical that's when you have art.

''That's what I think film should be really.''

So 'art', according to John Foxx, is 'A fine tuned organisational ability'.

''Charlie Chaplin films I think are very exciting things because they were made on back lots with not very much money and he was an old music hall artist who'd found a new medium in California on his travels. So the whole thing was a little adventure for him and he became a millionaire out of it, but he didn't really compromise what he did, he was still really a music hall artist. He'd learnt his craft and he'd organised himself in order to make it into an art.

''You get ballet dancers who admired his movements – they say he was absolutely immaculate. When you watch it you don't think about that – which is another way to define art, in that it doesn't announce itself as being art – it's quiet, but it seduces you into enjoying it'', says Foxx.

Discussion of film leads to Peter Greenaway's *The Draughtsmans Contract*, a film and film maker that Foxx had enthused about over lunch. His latest film is similar to Foxx's own work with touches of romance, substantial cerebral and technical importance and perhaps a touch of self-consciousness and preciousness.

''Yes, I like that film a lot, especially the way the music fits into it beautifully as well. The whole way it's played, it's very much a seventeenth century comedy of manners and it works beautifully, the photography is great.''

Like Greenaway, Foxx's work is a meeting of the technical and the romantic. It is perhaps his major appeal; the apparently naive concentration on imagery removed from everyday reality, and yet the awareness of events around him, all taken with the charming calm of the reserved Englishman.

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I pass down into courtyards full of pale climbing roses. Bronze figured fountains covered in verdigras spraying bright spectrums into the late sunlight. Groups of young people stroll or sit, talking and laughing and lovemaking in the shade of overgrown grottoes and dim niches in the ivied stone walls. Fireflies hover under the warm shadows.

A small studded gothic doorway leads out into a long avenue of lime trees that have joined far overhead, forming a structure very similar to that of a church with tall pillars soaring to a fan vaulted roof, except that the path between the avenue curves and gracefully descends a sweeping hill side. The sensation is that of being inside a long sloping corridor formed from a tall cathedral nave.

Sunlight falls through the leaves in long shafts of dusty yellow. There is a mist of bluebells on the ground.

Some ruined stained glass windows are set between the trees, which have grown around them and the remains of their stone tracery over hundreds of years. The light pours in through missing panes.

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from The Church. John Foxx, 1981.

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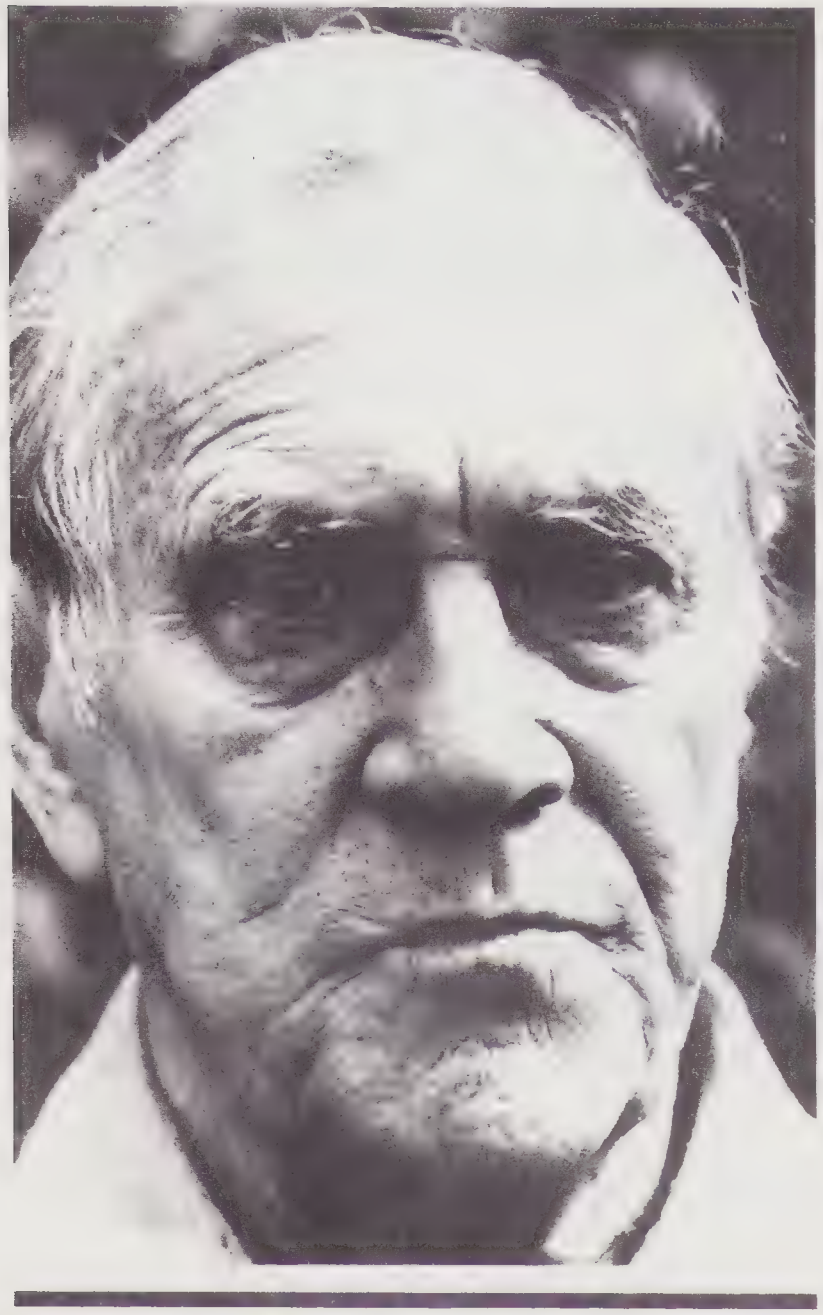
Patrick White

INTERVIEWED BY MARGARET SIMONS

Patrick White is without doubt Australia's best known author. Since being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1973 his position has been firmly established in the arts scene – despite White's ability to hide from the media.

His self portrait *Flaws In The Glass*, published in 1981, caused a massive stir as he unveiled his grievances against various members of the Arts – among the most prominent being Sir Sydney Nolan, who White refers to here as "The Queen's Irish Knight".

In this rare interview White discusses topics ranging from the theatre, politics and gossip, to sexual jealousy.



What would you like, coffee?

No, I don't drink coffee. I think I'll have a double scotch.

A double scotch?

Well, you see I had to give up drinking coffee. Manoly couldn't drink it because he has terrible arthritis and coffee makes it worse.

Waitress: *You could have tea, sir.*

No thank you, I don't feel in the mood for tea. I think I'll have a double scotch. A double scotch, yes . . . no ice, just some water.

First of all, I'd like to thank you for agreeing to this interview. I know you hate them.

Yes, I do.

Why?

You find yourself saying the same thing over and over again, unless you can turn a fresh sod.

How many interviews have you done?

Well, I don't know. I have no idea. I don't do them for a book but when I've got a play on that is a different matter. There are so many other people involved. You feel you have to do something for them.

When did you first get the idea for Signal Driver?

Signal *Driver*, not *Signal* Driver. When did I first get the idea? I don't know. It seems to have been happening all my life. And all the lives of a lot of people I know.

People trying to escape from things they can't escape from. Signalling the driver. I hear of that happening all the time. Wives who go to the station, spend a night in a hotel and go home again. And well one does have those trivial rows in any sustained relationship.

Where did you get the idea for using the clowns in the play?

I can't remember, quite honestly. I think I wanted a chorus of some kind who could comment, as Greek choruses do. But you couldn't have anything too close to a Greek chorus in Australia, so I made them two derros, who seem to be every few yards in Sydney. And also I wanted them to be supernatural beings, who could range through time and space so they could give more pointed comments. And then a bit of music hall crept in.

In your novels, there seems to be a constant undercutting of the dialogue and of the narrator's comments. You hardly ever make an outright statement without qualifying it in some way. Are the clowns the dramatic equivalent of that? Sort of you standing outside observing?

I don't honestly know. I never read my work once it's written. I've been listening to *The Tree of Man* as a serial, and it's very disturbing. That again is all one's life. Everything one has seen, heard and known. It's very upsetting. In that I feel I'm not standing outside observing. I suppose

if you dramatise something it's different.

Do you think there is anything special about writing, about being a novelist. In 'Flaws in the Glass', you talk about making furniture. Is that sort of creativity just as important?

I've always been fascinated by that sort of thing. Perhaps because when I was a child a cousin of mine at Mount Wilson used to make furniture and he was very good at it. Quite professional. He made the panelling for their house and all that sort of thing. I used to go out to the workshop and watch him. He was someone I liked so I suppose . . .

Furniture seems to have got into so many things I've written. Stan Parker is always doing things with wood in *The Tree of Man*. And tables are always cropping up. I mean real tables.

Kitchen tables?

Yes, kitchen tables.

Like the ones you used to write at?

Yes. So rarely at a proper desk. At one time I could only write in bed.

Was that because of the asthma?

No, I don't know why that was. Perhaps . . . it was when I was living in London, I found I could only write in bed. And then at Castle Hill when I did have asthma I had to write in bed. I only use a typewriter right at the end. So someone else can read it.

Getting back to the writer, in your books you occasionally talk about an artist, or art as some very special sort of insight. Do you think artists have special insight?

I don't know.

Do you?

I suppose I would have given up by now if I didn't think that. We all think we have special insight. Some certainly have, but lots of people think they have and haven't. Certainly haven't.

What about the artist? Anything special?

I think the special thing . . . in anyone . . . is intuition. People who don't have intuition are usually rather lacking.

Intuition rather than intellect?

Oh yes, I have never thought of myself as an intellectual.

But you have been called a very intellectual writer.

Oh yes I have been, but I'm not really. That's why intellectuals don't like my books. Because they don't realise the importance of intuition.

Anyone can have that kind of sensitivity. Anyone.

Do you have an audience in mind when you are writing?

Never. I just write and if someone reads it that's good.

Do other people matter to you? The readers and the critics?

I get angry with the critics sometimes. They can be terribly irritating when they are terribly stupid. Some of them are, you know. Some of them (laughs) haven't got the faintest idea. Now this is going to get terribly libellous.

We won't print the names.

No, I'd prefer if you didn't. Well someone like . . . . . He wrote about my plays from time to time, and we had a terrible row and I said 'You may have written good things about my plays from time to time, but as you are so wrong about practically everything I couldn't believe anything good you said either. That finished it off. Ha Ha.

Who does understand your work?

Oh, some actors. Neil Armfield and Jim Sharman know what I'm on about. There's a young one, you probably haven't heard of him called Jim Waites. He writes occasionally for the National Times, but they don't like him really because he makes it very difficult for them, upsetting the theatrical powers in Sydney. Er, I'm trying to think of some more . . .

Geoffrey Dutton? He seems to have leapt to your defence whenever you've been attacked.

That man can be so wrong. That relationship has ended anyway.

Oh.

He wrote a terrible slimy thing about me for *The Bulletin* when I was 70. You read it? Yes well it was against my wishes. Oh it made you cringe. And anyway, it was more about the Duttons than it was about me. Everything they review ends up being more about them.

There's one question I must ask you. I read through the file of clippings about you, and there was this controversy between Philip Adams and Geoffrey Dutton about whether you did or did not blow a raspberry at Frank Hardy. Adams said you did and Dutton said you didn't. Well did you?

I can't remember that occasion at all. No, quite wrong. Although Frank Hardy deserves many raspberries I don't think on that occasion . . . (laughs)

I do remember a very awful evening in a restaurant and Frank Hardy came in with another party . . . but I don't think anything like that occurred.

More seriously. In 'Signal Driver', there is that little mushroom cloud at the end. And the characters go off talking about love and food and home. Almost as though those things are more significant than the holocaust? Can qualities like that stop it?

I don't know. How can I possibly know. We can only keep on trying and trying. Did you hear a speech I made in Canberra at the ANU?

I read the transcript.

Well, I think there are masses of people all over the world who are working for this. But how you can persuade people in this country to think about such things, I don't know. Politicians keep on about uranium, and then just when you think they are going in the right direction they mine it.

Terry Johnson, the English playwright who wrote 'Insignificance' said he thought the prospect of nuclear warfare was actually making people think. He said it was a bit like saying "you might get run over by a bus tomorrow". It made you appreciate things more and knock yourself into some sort of ethical shape.

Oh, no I don't think so. You have people who love their families, but I don't think they love them more because they might get blown up.

And yet when there is a rally I am amazed at the number of people who turn up. But at the same time there are far more people going to the show or the football and all that.

"Intellectuals don't like my books because they don't realise the importance of intuition"

Are we more ignorant in Australia?

I suppose not, but your own always seem worst. When we go to Greece Manoly is always far more upset by the Greeks than I am.

Would you move from Australia?

No, I couldn't live anywhere else. I couldn't live anywhere else but in Sydney, I'm afraid.

What do you think are our main faults as a country?

Good question. (pause) We are so terribly materialistic. And we model ourselves on the dreadful Americans, that's half our trouble.

Did you know there's a touring party of Americans in this hotel? I saw them in the foyer.

Oh probably. They seem to be everywhere. (laughs) Such dreadful greed and snobbery. And then the politicians are so bad and corrupt. I'm fond of quoting Connor Cruise O'Brien. If a politician strays into an area of truthfulness, he is said to have made an awful gaffe. One I do believe to be an honest politician is Bill Hayden. He's one I go along with.

Do you still support the Labor Party?

I couldn't support anyone else. I don't go for this awful Chippery. And I could never never never vote Liberal. I don't really like meeting Liberals. There seem to be an awful lot of them around now. I meet them all over the place. At airports.

Do other authors – or would be authors – send their stuff to you for comment and so on?

Yes, I fiddle around with them and send them back. They don't realise that I'm getting on for seventy two and my eyesight is going. The money I got for the Nobel Prize I used to make an award every year to some Australian writer who has made a considerable contribution to Australian literature but hasn't has enough recognition. And anyone who has just had a slim book of verse or old people with historical novels in their bottom drawer seem to think they will be eligible. So they bung it in the post and it lands on my doorstep.

Do you have any advice for young writers?

Write. If you're going to write you will continue writing.

We're getting on to the things you've said before now.

Yes we are.

On something new then. You have talked a lot about the differences between men and women, and the similarities. What do you think the differences are?

I don't know. There is a lot of man in woman and a lot of woman in man. One thing I have always been aware of is that in Australia the women are generally a lot stronger than the men.

Why do you think that, I mean women haven't been able to . . .

Well maybe because I have a domineering mother and a mild father. It might be that. But all the women I've known have been very much stronger than the men.

But women haven't had a lot of things open to them in the past. There weren't many women journalists, for example, until recently.

Oh I don't know. Women journalists seem to have been coming at me for most of my life. You are just the last in a long line. (laughs) There were women journalists though, in my time. Or perhaps you wouldn't class them as journalists. More as social writers.

Well, isn't that it? Women were seen to be limited to that sphere.

Well one of my close friends, Elizabeth Riddell, seems to have been a journalist for ages. She's older than I am.

So do you think feminism is relevant, or necessary?

Well, they can be very irritating. Feminists and *gays* I think do more harm than anyone. I can't help but think they could make their point in a more subtle way. When I wrote *Flaws in the Glass* it encouraged a lot of people, from the letters I've had anyway. From all over the world.

"I would have liked to be a detective too. A detective in a big way, not a private eye or anything sordid"

Why did you feel it necessary to write Flaws in the Glass?

Well I thought at least I shall tell you what I think about myself before people start writing biographies. I'll say what I think is true.

I'd rather be dead before other people write about me, but I'm quite happy now I have written that. A lot of people bought it for the wrong reasons because the journalists got hold of it and dragged some bits of it out and left others. And then of course the Queen's Irish knight added to it all.

Yes, I wasn't sure whether to ask you about that. I know you must be sick of being asked about it.

Yes I am. I think he's gone a bit bonkers. And anyone who knew him and Cynthia said I told the truth and in a quite dignified way.

Were you shocked by his hitting out at you? Those paintings?

No, I was never all that impressed by him. It was far more Cynthia. He's done far more harm to himself than he has to me. I didn't like what he said about Manoly and Manoly was very upset. But anyway, he will bite the dust. He already has as far as his talent goes.

In 'Flaws in the Glass', you said that everyday, somebody, somebody public lets you down. Could you explain that to me?

Well, they do. Some of them in quite trivial ways. Then there are people you thought were on the right track politically and they let you down. One of the worst let downs is people who have double standards. I can't bear that and I can't bear lies.

And injustice. You can't get justice through the law. They are so obsessed with the letter of it.

And who are the people you can rely on?

Well, I can't possibly make a list, I might leave some out and they would be very upset.

What's the state of play about the film of 'Voss'?

I would have thought you would have heard all that, up and down and in and out. I've got a veto on the director no matter where it is made. I don't know what Sir Bonkers thinks he's on about.

How did it all begin?

Well it was all thanks to Harry Miller, who at that time was going around with someone called Bo Bo Faulkner. She told Harry he must make a film of *Voss*, for which I shall never forgive her. First of all we thought we'd try to get Ken Russell. That was in the time when he was making things like . . . but no. You're too young to remember them. (laughs) You forget that people don't remember.

When I talk about people in the theatre, people you think are quite old, and they say 'well my mother might have known her'.

Sad?

Well, I've got my little store of facts and information. You do like to share them sometimes.

Do you feel you've shared things?

I've shared plenty. I would have liked to have been other things, though.

Like what?

I would have liked to be a film director, but you have to start right from the beginning, when you were young. You can convey far more with film. Far more than theatre. Wonderful what you can do. Not these Australian *movies* they churn out – dreadful things. They tend to want to churn out another *Brilliant Carreer* all the time. There have been good Australian films, though. *The Year of Living Dangerously* impressed me. It had some silly things in it though.

Do you have ideas about the type of films you would like to be made from your books?

I'd rather films were not made of books. Michael Moynihan adapted *The Tree of Man* to radio, he also adapted it to film. I was very upset by that. I don't mind hearing it but I don't want to see it.

There is one thing that might persuade me to make a film of that book. There is a scene where an old man is seen hanging upside down from a tree. I would like to play that part. Directors and writers like to appear in their own films, and that would be my part. Hanging upside down in a tree. I think that would be wonderful.

Has anybody offered to write your biography yet?

Yes. An *American*. He's written a book about my work with an awful title. It's so awful I'm embarrassed to repeat it. It's called *Laden Choirs*. He wrote to me asking me to turn over all my papers to him. Well, I don't have any papers. I asked my friends to destroy all my letters, but I hear of them flogging them.

Oh no!

Yes, now there is one of the ways people let you down. I was told by an academic friend of mine that the reason all these academics write to me is in the hope I'll write back and then they'll have a letter to flog.

Oh hell!

Yes. Makes you feel sorry for me doesn't it? Another thing I would have liked to be is a cook, if I'd started from the bottom and trained under a great chef. I'm not a bad cook.

Don't you get sick of it?

Yes, sometimes. And when you're old it gets to be a bit of a drag.

What sort of cooking do you do?

All sorts. All nations and all kinds. Manoly says I would throw the food in my customers' faces, though.

I would have liked to be a detective too. A detective in a big way, not a private eye or anything sordid. An international detective.

Why?

Well, you see so much crime around and people getting away with it. I'd like to see justice done.

Do you like the idea of punishment?

I like the idea of justice. There are so many people who ought to be in jail and who aren't. They buy their way out. Don't you think they ought to be in jail?

Don't you think it might be better to . . . change people.

Well that would be wonderful, but I do not think you can change people. We're trying to change people in the face of this nuclear horror. That we've got to go on trying to do, but I think it's very hard to change individuals.

So what do you do? Shut them away?

No, but when I think of all the people I have tried to change, (laughs) they run a mile some of them when they see me, they hate it, and you can't blame them.

What sort of people?

I'm talking about, well, silly people. I would like to knock some sense into their heads.

Do they feel the same way about you?

I'm sure they do. They think I'm deeply wrong.

And do you change?

Yes, I've changed over the years. A lot of people wouldn't agree, but I think in many ways I've become more tolerant. I suppose . . . I suppose it's just giving in.

Why?

Well you can't do anything about them. Neighbours and people like that. How futile they are.

That's strange, because the things that touched me most in 'Flaws in the Glass' are the times you talk about the simple things, pets and neighbours and furniture of course . . .

I've got some wonderful neighbours, but some of them are so pretentious and don't care about anything except themselves and shopping and their houses.

And you are more tolerant of that?

Well, no, I suppose I'm not really more tolerant of that at all. No. But then, I'm not really jealous any more. I was terribly jealous in my youth.

Sexual jealousy?

Sexual jealousy. Jealous of writers that you knew were inferior but who were accepted when you were regarded as a freak. That got you down. But then you need a hundred years before a writer can be assessed. I might turn out to be nothing at all. You go down the list of Nobel Prize winners and some of them were nothing at all.

In 'Flaws in the Glass', you talk of people like Jim Sharman as your literary children. Could you talk some more about that?

Well, it's something fresh in their work. Something new. His *Death in Venice* was one of my great evenings in the theatre. Did you see his revival of *The Cheery Soul*? It was quite different from John's (John Sumner) here. John had quite a lot of elderly actors stumbling around in the dark wondering if they were going to fall down, and Jim decided to have much younger ones and even grown actors acting as children and it all worked in an amazing way. It was terrific.

What do you think of Melbourne Theatre in general? And the MTC?

Long time since I saw anything by the MTC. I was always terribly grateful to John when he did my plays. He didn't do *Season at Sarsaparilla* well, because the characters didn't fit with the permanent company, and the set was quite wrong. It seemed quite incredible in the play that those characters should be living next to each other, which they did in Sarsaparilla where I lived. I saw it going on. It didn't have credibility in the play.

The Cheery Soul had some wonderful moments. I didn't agree with one critic who said *The Cheery Soul* is a dreary soul. There were people flying about the foyer. Dame Peggy von Prague rushing about saying 'It just isn't theatre, darling'. Ha Ha.

What are you working on at the moment.

A play.

Will you talk about it?

No.

Well, then, the future in general. New technology.

I think it's becoming increasingly awful. I don't understand all this computer business. Do you? Soft . . . what do they call it?

Software.

Yes software. They used to have soft ware on the third floor of David Jones. I wish someone could explain it to me. I know the bank has been much more inefficient since they had software. God the bank!

Are there any advantages?

Oh, I think you can make use of things in the theatre which you couldn't do before.

Is there anything in the future you are frightened of?

Well, the holocaust won't worry me. I'm old and that's that. It's worrying for those who will be destroyed by it. The younger people and the people who will be mutilated.

I'm certainly not afraid of death.

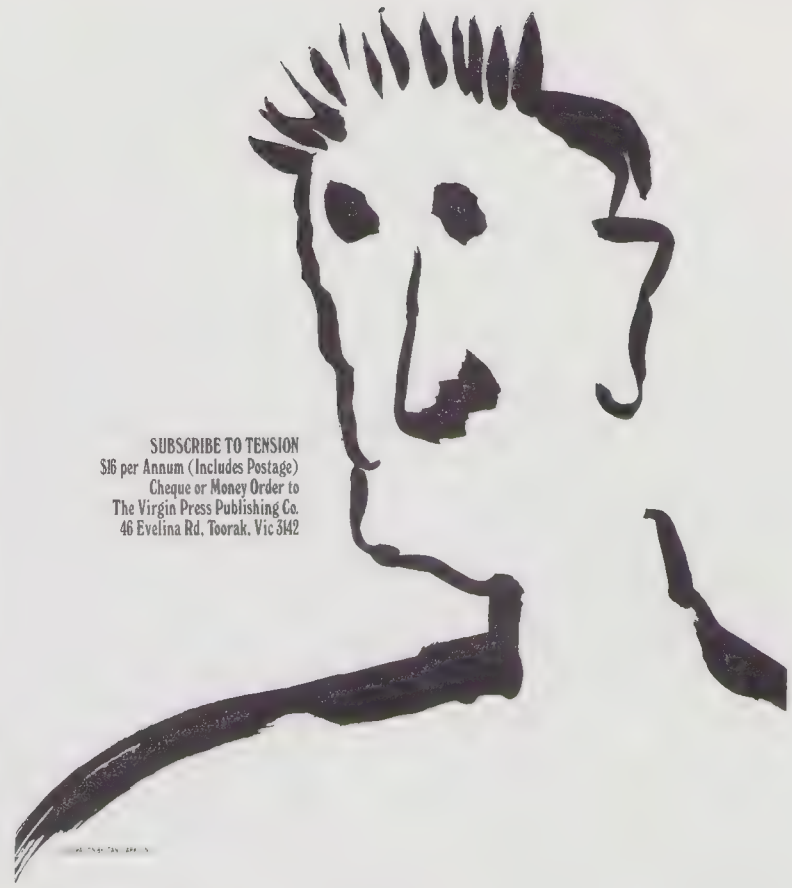
Do you believe in an after life?

I don't know. Death will be either something or nothing and either will be wonderful.

And what do you look forward to in life?

Keeping my wits about me as long as possible. Trying to do something to avert the possibility of nuclear disaster. To write a bit more, if I remain able to. Manoly of course has been very ill. He has arthritis. He has been better lately of course. And so we totter about, and support each other, but that's all, half the time.

I can't be happy in the world as it is. I could be happy if I just closed my eyes to things. I have plenty of money. I could spend it on myself. ●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NICK CAVE

NICK CAVE has changed a great deal since I first met him in 1979. Then, arrogance covered insecurity and copious amounts of alcohol were a crutch. Today a confidence in his own creative abilities allows an air of security, and the alcohol has become fuel for some grotesque inner energy that has bewildered journalists and audiences the world over.

His fame was established during the reign of The Birthday Party as hippest band in England. Magazine covers became a normal event for the emaciated artist, but Cave seems oblivious to much of the attention: he prefers to contemplate the fate of his somewhat infamous one-page plays.

The plays were produced in conjunction with Lydia Lunch during a period of intense creativity and travel. As well as the plays Cave found time to record a solo album, the last Birthday Party album and to tour with a one-off project entitled The Immaculate Consumptive.

The Immaculate Consumptive included Lydia Lunch, Clint Ruin (of You've Got Foetus On Your Breath), Marc Almond (of the recently defunct Soft Cell) and Cave. The latter enjoys snickering into his third beer as he recounts his disastrous renditions of the Presley number "In The Ghetto".

Nick Cave remains one of the most important creative figures in the contemporary arts. The following is a transcript of a conversation between Melbourne artist Tony Clark and Cave; a small part of a conversation that has been wandering along for several years between the two.

Ashley Crawford

BY TONY CLARK

ONE THING THAT I'VE NOTICED with a lot of your peers also but particularly with you, is this idea of increasingly taking 'the writer' as a role model in a way that never seemed that pronounced before. You talk about narrative, and developing a theme in a literary way. Is that to do with seeing yourself less as a performer, where the emphasis was very much on the visual?

NC: The emphasis was for other people, it wasn't for myself, inasmuch as I never considered that to be the number one – which was probably an egotistical, pat-on-the-back type of thing for me to think at the time when I was in the Birthday Party. That's not what I consider important even though it's what everybody else considers to be important. I consider what I'm actually singing as important.

It's not as if you've made the transition from being 'a poet' or someone who was committed to literature, to just 'putting it to music' or something...

The process for me to write a song these days is not a matter of sitting down for half an hour and being able to come up with a three minute set of lyrics. 'A Box for Black Paul' which is a song on my solo record – I've been writing it for maybe four months or so. I can show you an inch-high stack of 'Box for Black Paul's, which have just been revised, basically as far as I can see in the same way as you'd write a novel. There's a very simple blues song on my solo record – 'Wings Off Flies', which is Pierre's title and idea, which is the 'she loves me, she loves me not' thing, pulling the wings off flies rather than the petals off a flower – there's about eight different versions of that particular song. I don't really write off-the-head pop songs, and I don't make things up as I go along, I'm not spontaneous on stage either with what I sing...

The way that your songs were presented live always tended to reinforce the feeling of 'here's this psycho, and he's got these peculiar ideas coming to him, and is more or less blabbing them out...'

I hadn't really thought of it like that but it's quite obvious I suppose. But it's quite true, I did spend a great length of time and effort writing a song and then give up half the middle section in order to do a back flip and lose the microphone. But that was just the different way you were feeling when you were actually performing, to when you're actually writing them – it's a quite different set of circumstances.

Did you, in the past, write much more with a view to performing?

Well, I used to write far more ejaculatory stuff; there would be a lot of lines in it which would be things that could be screamed into the face of someone and which sounded like direct comments to them, like 'Express yourself!' or that sort of stuff, which I suppose was done with a view to live things. But none of it all that consciously. The writing of the plays happened at approximately the time where I started to feel ineffectual in terms of being able to have the capacity to upset anybody anymore, rather than just feed everybody. I would say that was the primary reason for writing the plays, choosing that medium to begin with, which I wouldn't say I'm prejudiced against, particularly because I can't think of any medium that I'm particularly prejudiced for, above any other. Or that I would like to spend the rest of my life doing; and whether that means being like a jack-of-all-trades or what... to see the sum total of what I've done in my life as being on records would be most unrewarding.

What sort of circumstances were they written in?

They were just written in my bedsit in Earl's

Court, and basically showing them to no-one and not considering them any more than a private little idea I had of making a book, writing a book, but the book was actually just fifty short plays. It was to be presented in novel form, not in the theatre.

So the focus at first was on publishing?

Yes, but . . . I'd written four of these really short plays the first time I'd come to England, whenever that was, whenever the first time it was when we left Australia. I'd written a few, but like a year or two hence, I started to write them properly.

Did the inspiration for the plays come from the lyrics you'd been writing, or did it come from other interests which started to feed in and crossover with the idea of performing?

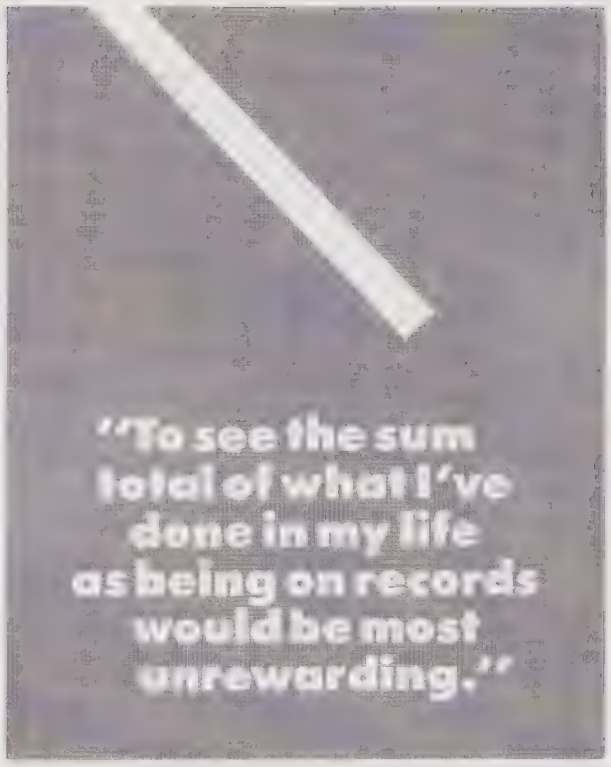
When I was writing the lyrics it was easier in a sense to write dialogue because I knew I was going to sing, so I knew that I could write down this appalling line, but that once it was sung it would mean something entirely different, but to be read it would be something you'd bug your eyes at and pass off as a bad mistake. That was part of the charm of writing for me, writing in the theatrical way, that I sort of visualised it; even though they were to be read as a novel would be read, it was still in my mind that there would be a speech by someone and I would still think of it in terms of a speech by . . . Hamlet, an actor onstage talking to a group of people. If you see the plays themselves it was the fact that there was this kind of unreal static environment and situation where there was someone standing on the front of the stage pretending he was somebody else, and that made it really interesting to write dialogue. There's certain elements in it like the use of profanities, swear-words and so forth or verbal cliches which are used with such abundance that they become . . . Most of the ideas for those plays – they were written a couple of years ago anyway – were just harping on the same type of thing over and over again until it lost its meaning and became this sort of nagging type of poetry. And also using things that were: the first time – shocking; the second time – you hear it; the third time, fourth time . . . until someone was saying a speech to you that would've upset most people but by the end of the speech it became like they were just saying . . . pap. They were the basic ideas behind those plays.

How do you conceive of the difference between the plays as printed in a book and the plays as performed?

Well first of all, all the stage directions and that sort of stuff were as humorous and as thought out lyrically as was any of the rest of it for the book. Such and such walked across and did such and such, or exit stage whatever, all of that was involved in the book, but when I rewrote them for the stage there wasn't that accent.

So you redrafted them?

I didn't need to redraft them all, but a lot of them I needed to put in how you would do it. When I found out there was someone who wanted to put them on in Australia there were obviously a lot of them that just couldn't be put on. There was one play, which was the first play me and Lydia wrote together – I've forgotten the name of it but it was basically all action and all the action



was just a bit of sex in some sort of . . . up against a skip or a garbage dumpster or something. If it was acted on stage it would just be somebody doing a fairly ordinary, obvious thing up against a garbage dumpster with somebody else, but the way the directions of what was actually going on were written was in a poetical, lyrical fashion, so that was it. At the end they say one word or two words to each other, and that's the end of the play. So that was basically something to be read, not to be performed, or else you could just go out on any Saturday night and go into any back lot and see it exactly – you wouldn't have to pay your money to get in. I originally wrote like ten of these plays before I met Lydia or anything – based around the hot-rod track.

You established a location for them at the beginning?

I thought there were going to be fifty-five themes, ten plays per theme. It was all mathematically worked out in that way. There were going to be ten plays that were fairly trashy and based around the speedway races; the basic characters were stock characters and kind of big, handsome, sexy car drivers; grease monkeys, the sad grease monkey who always was fixing cars and never doing anything else, and big sexy women who just sort of . . . said very little and put their hands up their dresses, most acts. And the imagery repeated, the whole thing repeated to a tedious length I guess.

What's this about a poetry festival?

That's held in Holland . . . Rotterdam or Amsterdam . . . the World Poetry festival. You have to hand in a number of works of your poetry – it's a fairly loose description, a vile one but a fairly loose one, of what you do – and then you read out at it for thirty or forty minutes. It sounds pretty mammoth – I think it's basically for poets who write poetry, and they get a chance to read their latest book of poetry that never got published or that did get published and they're advertising it. It's frequented by total grotesque individuals like William Burroughs, and totally wonderful ones like Ricky Lee Jones as well. Patti Smith gets up there and airs her armpits for a while.

Have you done any poetry readings?

No, I've only written about three poems and they were when I was about fourteen. But I would just quite like to go. At the end of the day you sit around with the poets who have also read out on your day, and there's a number of days that it goes on for. And then you have budding young poets who didn't get into the festival shooting questions to you. My agent said there was no problem getting in to do this thing.

What about your activity as a painter?

Well I painted the next Birthday Party cover. Basically the only times I pull out a paintbrush these days is to come up with a belated idea for a cover because the record's been done for a month and there's still no cover, type of thing. Hence the 'Bad Seed' one, and the next one, which is basically some roses and stuff. It really looks like a first year adult education centre, half-way-through-the-year painting by a seventy-year-old woman . . . Negro woman.

But you've kept in touch with painting. You went to Zeitgeist – and you were asked by the Cologne group of painters to join in in some capacity.

They were going to give me a space in their three-storey factory area. A huge cement and glass building of three storeys or so. That's what they had . . . I don't know what they do these days. I'm sure they've huffed and puffed amongst one another and stacked all their paintings up and put them under their arm and stormed off to their separate ones by now. But as we were saying the other day, I've always been a bit conservative in this respect and I've always considered that 'at least there's the painters'. They're like the Rock of Peter, Peter the Rock or whatever it is. They seem to be really insular and swayed by fluctuations within their own movement but basically away from all the fashionableness and the trends, the kind of storefront trends and so forth. Meeting these Cologne painters it was very obvious that it was no longer that way. I don't know if it is a good thing or a bad thing. I wasn't inclined to take up their offer simply because they'd never seen whether I knew which end of a brush to poke at a canvas anyway. But they'd seen the Birthday Party play a couple of times in Cologne so . . . ▶

Nick Cave and Lydia Lunch.

NICK CAVE

There's been a lot of publicity given to the activity of painting of late; that it's had a new lease of life . . .

It's no longer the little dwarf. It's kind of branching out . . . you're having rock groups with people doing paintings behind them, and all sorts of weird and wonderful ideas like that. But if I was a painter I would clear right out if I felt . . . I would go back to the garret if I heard that sort of thing coming. I don't see any particular reason why the arts aren't snobbish to each other, and segregated. I really don't know how other people consider things, but it seems to me that all the negative aspects of things, the aspects that seem to alienate you, tend to be the ones that produce the best sorts of things. Not to all join in, all give everyone a bit of a lift, a foot up, painters aligning themselves with New Wave groups and New Wave groups aligning themselves . . . All is good that ends up being good, but it just seems . . . The most impressive thing, the most exciting thing for me of seeing the Cologne painters was talking to one or two of them, and there was this wicked glint in a couple of their eyes when they said: 'I got such and such for this or its equivalent and could do two more tomorrow if I felt like it'. It was good to see a twenty-three year old getting all the money . . . it was like the younger and the more precocious you were about the whole thing the more you were worth, basically. They weren't so precious as to think that everything they did was some masterpiece that would be hallowed as a stroke of genius for the next six centuries, and they were taking as much opportunity of this gold strike or whatever it was.

You're not interested in the big paint/rock crossover?

One of the many tantrums I had on the tour in America was that Lydia had invited some young boy, some young tall skinny boy with black hair to hang two of his paintings on the stage, one on either side, quite large imposing paranoid figurative paintings of what it's like to live in the East End or whatever. I don't know, he probably would have got an 'A', but I just thought that they were . . . to have these paintings there was too gross. But I whispered in the ear of one or two people that I thought it was a bad idea, anyway, and I tried to say to the boy 'look, don't hang them up, they're bound to get ripped or someone's gonna throw a beer can at them'. But he persisted anyway and they ended up being there.

What's the concept for the cover on your own record?

Just a photo of my face on the front, and I wanted to use photos of who's played on the record, which is Blixer; Anita who's in the group as well; Mick; Barry Adamson. I've got the best photograph of Anita anyway, that's one reason why she's in the group. She's holding on to a kitten and she's really got a lot of lipstick on and a lot of makeup – it's just the most bizarre, horrifying photograph you've ever seen but at the same time she looks really great.

So you've relinquished the golden opportunity to do the difinitive Nick Cave painted cover?

I've always done the covers and the group's looked at them and gone "Oh fucking hell" but it's always been too late. I've done the cover and handed it in and it's been processed. Now I can have a big photo of myself! There's not the problem of having four faces on the front . . .

To have to paint around.

To have to become a Nazi cover because the only thing that'll fit around it is a swastika. Which reminds me of the other – I've forgotten his name now, but the other writer who I consider to be one of the best chroniclers of the Birthday Party, or at least myself anyway, who wrote something which I kept, always, in my wallet. Someone from Melody Maker or Sounds, who compared me to Celine, who I don't like in the slightest anyway . . .

You'd like him if you read an interview with him from the *Paris Review* . . .

Well maybe I would but he said how he loved Celine's writing, and couldn't help but like his writing but then at the same time he couldn't help but be repulsed by Celine's fascist tendencies, which is exactly the way he felt about the Birthday Party. Nick Cave in particular, that he considered him to be a great lyric writer and was drawn all the time towards his lyrics and so forth, but then repulsed, once again, because everything I delivered was 'packaged Nazi'. That's such a rock writer's syndrome. They create a monster, and then they have it sodomize them, and then they squeal like stuck pigs. This article went on to pick out all the little bits that proved that I was a raging Nazi. And if the band has any sense of humour it can't help but stick another swastika on the next cover because it's just impossible not to after a while – it's all such a joke. On my solo record one of the things I wanted to do was put a white cover with a big . . .

Swastika!

Swastika on it. ●

ON THE BEACH

INTRODUCTION: suicidal short story/the OTB identity
-Ross Gibson
INTRODUCTION TO THE AUSTRALIAN EXHIBITION IN PARIS
- Meaghan Morris
A REVIEW OF THE AUSTRALIAN EXHIBITION
- Sam Mele
TOUCH ME TELEVISION
- Mark Titmarsh
PAPER DELIVERED TO THE FOURTH SYDNEY SUPER 8 FILM FESTIVAL
- Adrian Martin
NEW MUSIC, NEW MUSIC CRITICISM
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A REVIEW OF EDGE CITY ON TWO DIFFERENT PLANS
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THE FUTURE OF OUR ART
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Photo of Andy Warhol by Issey Miyake from the book 'Bodyworks', (See page 32).

I think I will....

Books

Terence Hogan

Photographs & Words
Wright Morris
Hard cover, 120 pages
Published by The Friends of Photography

Women In The Magic Mirror
Giuliana Scime
Hard cover, 160 pages
Published by Selezione d'Immagini

i 50 volti di Juliet
Man Ray
Hard cover, 100 pages
Published by Gabriele Mazzotta

Distributed by Lamella, Sydney

Uncle Harry, 194-

Photographs & Words

WRIGHT MORRIS

Bedroom, 194-

In the introduction to this uncommonly beautiful book, the photographer/author Wright Morris refers to the problem the public has accepting a work juxtaposing text and photographs which spring from the same creative impulse, but do not describe exactly the same subject. The commercial failure of his two books from the 40s, *The Inhabitants* and *The Home Place*, being prime examples.

However in *Photographs & Words* there is no doubt that Morris' text charges his photographic work with a profoundly personal response to a place and its objects that we can at once, all recognise. There is a sentiment revealed which might seem to be nostalgic but these images do *not* long for the past, instead they quietly confront time's passing.

Morris' eye for form, light, texture and all the other concerns of a great photographer is self-evident in its excellence. Also evident is the way in which the quality of his response to a personal experience has immediately given it the strength of a report on the *American* experience. But it is the heart in Morris' work that allows his eye and mind that strength.

His best photographs capture the way the action of man and time upon a building, a homely artifact, a piece of clothing etc, imbues them with that presence and poignancy that we are all affected by in our day to day life. It requires an artist to witness and then re-present this quality so tellingly.

Morris writes of that line between wearing something in and wearing it out, being as "vague as the receding horizon and as hard to account for as the missing hairs of a brush". Hence the universality of these photographs, taken almost exclusively in the 40s in rural America – another time and another place but very close to home.

Women In The Magic Mirror

GIULIANA SCIME

Andre Kertesz. *Distortion* #0. 1933.

Bert Hartkamp is an Amsterdam lawyer and collector of photographs. If, as Guiliana Scime states, this book represents a "tiny fragment" of Bert Hartkamp's private collection then we can only marvel at the scope of the photographic work embodied in that collection. For *Women in the Magic Mirror* is something of a feast in itself.

To quote further from Giuliana Scime's introduction: "Bert Hartkamp's private collection is one of the richest and most interesting in the world today, even if this assertion includes public collections as well . . . Beginning more than twenty-five years ago, he collected anything and everything to do with photography. As he himself explains it, he was motivated by 'a longing to hold in my own hands the photographic objects made with the techniques described in books'. . . Throughout the intervening years he has put together a cultural patrimony of almost inestimable quality, quantity, rarity and beauty".

Women in the Magic Mirror draws approximately 150 images from that collection. The selection includes photographs taken between 1842 and 1981 and not only is it an exposition of much that has changed and a great deal that has remained the same for women over that time, it is also a fascinating history of the medium itself.

It would be fruitless to try and detail the variety of examples shown, from the Victorian daguerrotypes and bakerlite portrait pendants to the 'Red Series' of Christian Vogt and Landweber's polaroids, except to say that almost every major photographer and the finest work of many minor artists is represented.

Women from all strata of society, of all races and in a great diversity of settings and states of mind. Women photographed by men and by women. And a book for all.

i 50 volti di Juliet

MAN RAY

In 1940, after twenty years of work in Paris, the great American Man Ray returned to New York with thoughts of moving on to Tahiti for a vacation. For Ray an extraordinarily fertile and influential era had come to an end and yet another was to begin.

After a short rest, meeting with only his closest friends he set off across country with an acquaintance of his sister, to eventually arrive in Los Angeles where he decided to stay. The day after Man Ray's arrival in Hollywood he met Juliet Browner.

i 50 volti di Juliet (The 50 faces of Juliet) is a collection of photographs by Ray of the woman who six years later became his wife, and constant companion until his death in 1977. Henry Miller once described her as "petite, charming, with the grace of a ballet dancer (and) an ideal companion – more a mistress than a wife."[1]

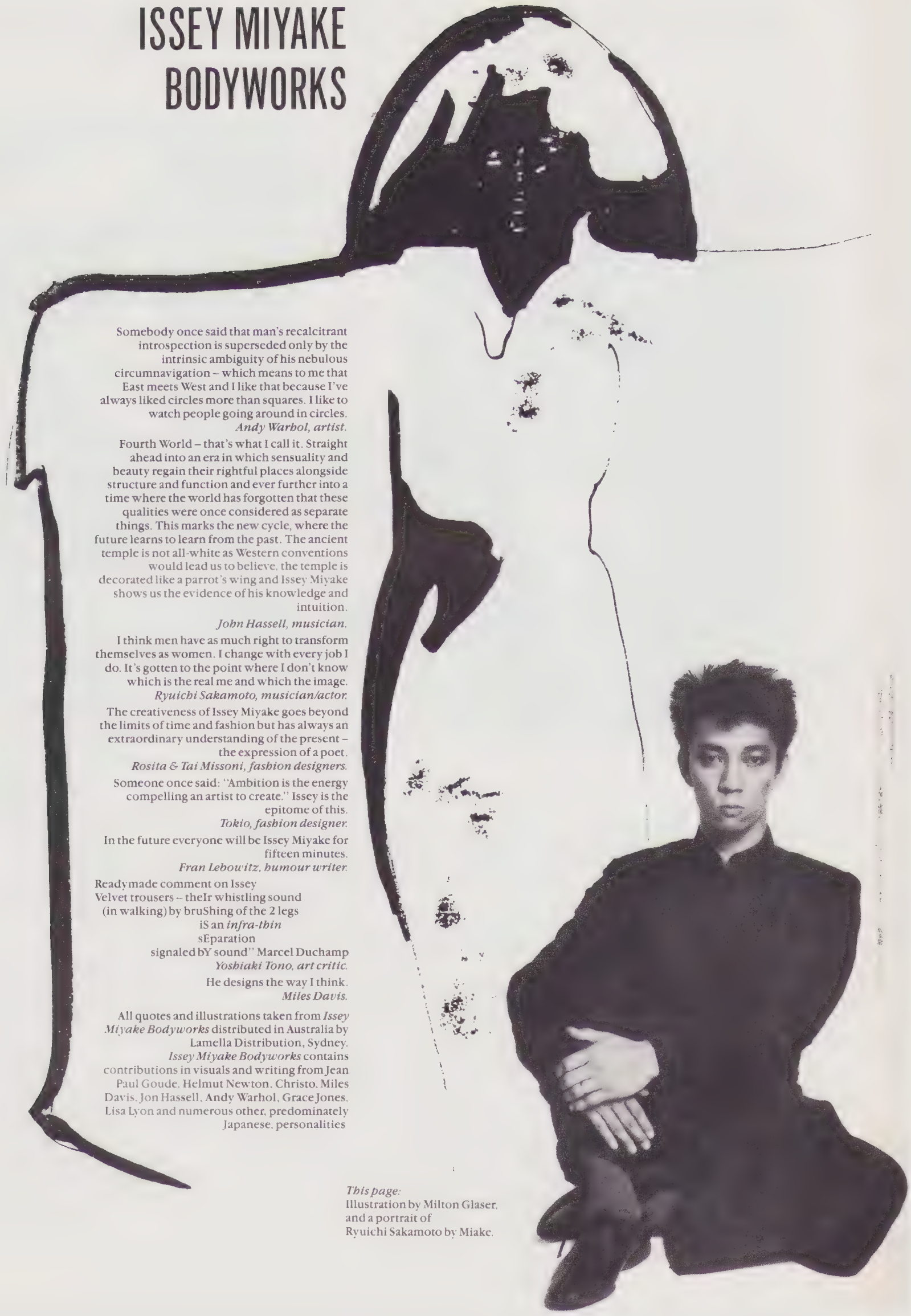
These portraits confirm Miller's thumbnail sketch and much more as Ray's relentless exploration of numerous avenues of photographic expression serves to suggest many shades of character and personality. Technique and tampering are never at the expense of the subject.

The photographs range from a 'snapshot' of Juliet standing beside Ray's new "beautiful, streamlined, metallic-blue car", through almost Hollywood studio styled 'mannequin' studies to various scratched, treated and hand-coloured prints. From openly Romantic to starkly expressionistic.

An absorbing collection typical of Man Ray in its diversity and integrity and needless to say, a labour of love.

1. *Man Ray*. Arturo Schwarz (Thames and Hudson)

ISSEY MIYAKE BODYWORKS



Somebody once said that man's recalcitrant introspection is superseded only by the intrinsic ambiguity of his nebulous circumnavigation – which means to me that East meets West and I like that because I've always liked circles more than squares. I like to watch people going around in circles.
Andy Warhol, artist.

Fourth World – that's what I call it. Straight ahead into an era in which sensuality and beauty regain their rightful places alongside structure and function and ever further into a time where the world has forgotten that these qualities were once considered as separate things. This marks the new cycle, where the future learns to learn from the past. The ancient temple is not all-white as Western conventions would lead us to believe, the temple is decorated like a parrot's wing and Issey Miyake shows us the evidence of his knowledge and intuition.
John Hassell, musician.

I think men have as much right to transform themselves as women. I change with every job I do. It's gotten to the point where I don't know which is the real me and which the image.
Ryuichi Sakamoto, musician/actor.

The creativeness of Issey Miyake goes beyond the limits of time and fashion but has always an extraordinary understanding of the present – the expression of a poet.
Rosita & Tai Missoni, fashion designers.

Someone once said: "Ambition is the energy compelling an artist to create." Issey is the epitome of this.
Tokio, fashion designer.

In the future everyone will be Issey Miyake for fifteen minutes.
Fran Lebowitz, humour writer.

Readymade comment on Issey
Velvet trousers – theIr whistling sound
(in walking) by bruShing of the 2 legs
iS an *infra-thin*
sEparation
signaled bY sound" Marcel Duchamp
Yoshiaki Tono, art critic.

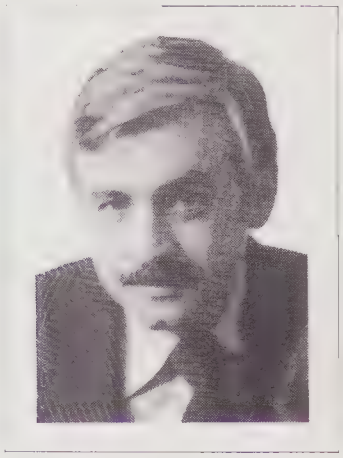
He designs the way I think.
Miles Davis.

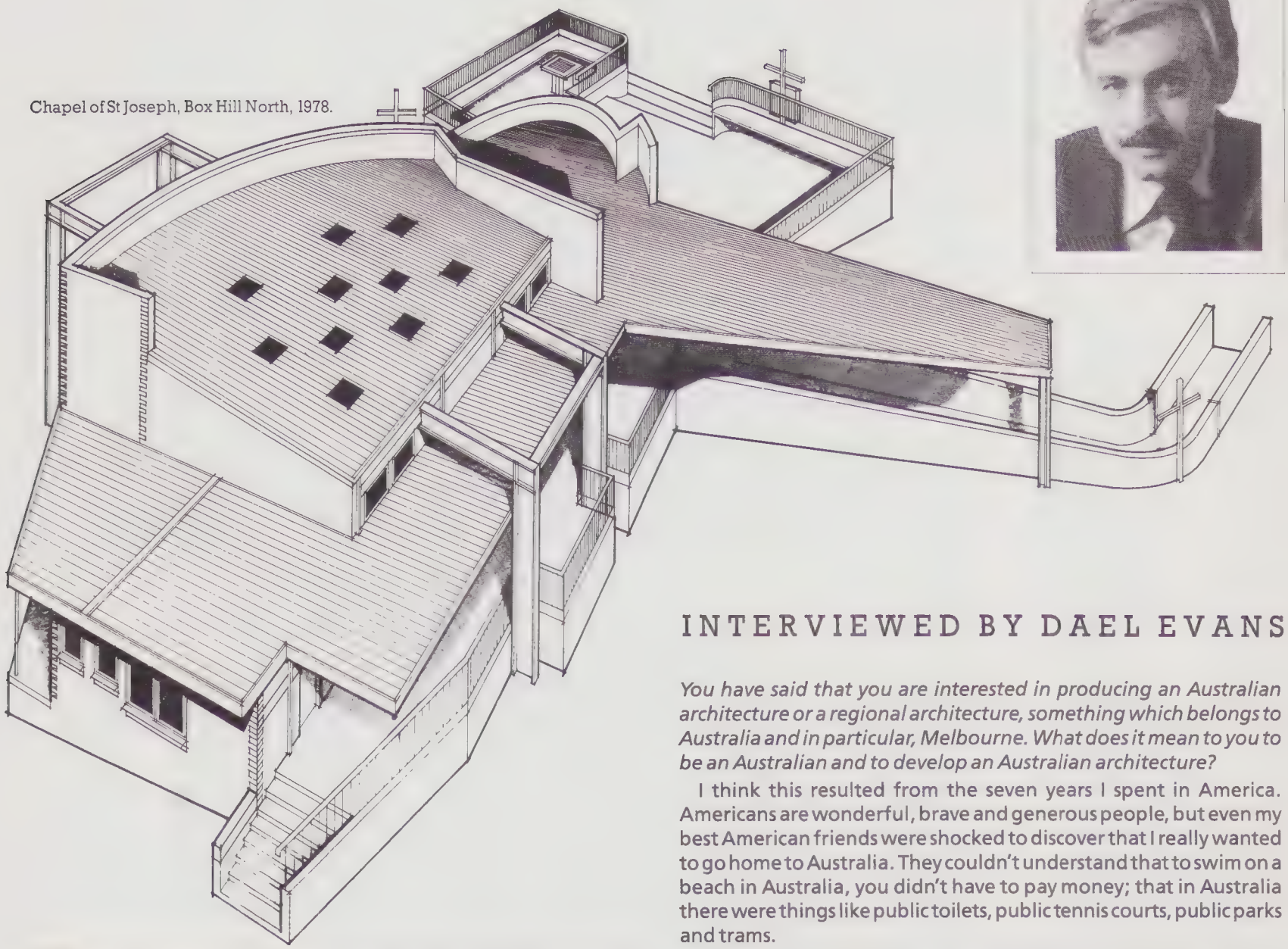
All quotes and illustrations taken from *Issey Miyake Bodyworks* distributed in Australia by Lamella Distribution, Sydney. *Issey Miyake Bodyworks* contains contributions in visuals and writing from Jean Paul Goude, Helmut Newton, Christo, Miles Davis, Jon Hassell, Andy Warhol, Grace Jones, Lisa Lyon and numerous other, predominately Japanese, personalities

This page:
Illustration by Milton Glaser, and a portrait of Ryuichi Sakamoto by Miake.

This page:
Tina Chow
Inset:
Issey Miake
in his studio.

PETER CORRIGAN





Chapel of St Joseph, Box Hill North, 1978.

INTERVIEWED BY DAEL EVANS

Peter Corrigan emerged through the late '70's as one of Australia's contemporary architectural heroes and its *enfant terrible*. He is both architect and theatre designer.

Corrigan's architecture is charged with an intelligent inquiry into the banality and rituals of our everyday existence. His work is a twisted hybrid of theory, iconoclasticism, eclecticism, an ironic pursuit for beauty and, above all, nationalism.

The patterned layers of brickwork, promiscuous use of colour, contorted forms and suburban imagery of his architecture, stand as testament and play a part in his and our struggle for cultural sophistication and identity.

After graduating from Melbourne University in 1966, Corrigan left for America, completed a post-graduate course in environmental design at Yale and worked there for five years. On returning to Melbourne in 1975, he set up practice with Maggie Edmond, took up teaching at R.M.I.T. and continued to design sets for Melbourne theatre. He is about to leave Melbourne and become a Guest Critic at the Architecture Department at Harvard University for the Fall Semester of 1983.

This interview was recorded one drizzly Melbourne night in Corrigan's office. The following is a transcript.

You have said that you are interested in producing an Australian architecture or a regional architecture, something which belongs to Australia and in particular, Melbourne. What does it mean to you to be an Australian and to develop an Australian architecture?

I think this resulted from the seven years I spent in America. Americans are wonderful, brave and generous people, but even my best American friends were shocked to discover that I really wanted to go home to Australia. They couldn't understand that to swim on a beach in Australia, you didn't have to pay money; that in Australia there were things like public toilets, public tennis courts, public parks and trams.

It seemed to me the longer I spent there, the more irritated I got with their smugness, their charmed assumptions regarding the wisdom of the free enterprise system, and all of the things that Americans hold dear, like guns. I missed my larrikin friends, the larrikin humour, and the scepticism.

From 15,000 miles, I began to understand the experiences that were essential to my life. It became quite clear to me anyway that when I got back home, national sentiment and the positive sides of the Australian character were issues that would preoccupy my working life. This obviously takes in the complete spectrum of Australian culture, whether it's rock and roll, fashion, Australian Rules football, Stewarts saloon bar, and The Age. What is crucial is the sense of oneself and one's point in time. Seven years with the A.P.G. confirmed this beyond doubt.

In the midst of all of this self image, the idea of buildings that we can call our own arose. Buildings that wouldn't be found anywhere else in the world. That would look completely out of place in Japan, or Brazil or wherever. A dead-set local product.

We've always known about Australian poetry, we've understood Australian painting, Australian cricket's always been different; bush amateur until recently. We have all sorts of odds and ends and these

PHOTO BY RENNIE ELLIS

elements constitute a culture. It might well be second-rate, but at least it's ours. We need to close ranks.

The issue of an Australian Culture, is of course, not the only one. There are the "perennial artistic" concerns. For example, loss of our relationship with nature; for want of a better term, "original sin"; the romantic versus the classical mentality; the problem of living some sort of decent life; the nature of modernity, etc., etc. Somewhere out there, these issues all impinge upon architecture. But in Australia, right now, I think our national soul is a major concern. This search is appropriate in Melbourne at this point in time.

Why do you find it necessary to look at the existing cultural patterns in order to establish what you see as being an Australian architecture. Couldn't we possibly start somewhere else?

I honestly don't know where else to look to be frank. It seems to me we are the sum total of our experiences. This is not meant as a mechanistic analysis. Anyway, the artist has the responsibility to address his work to his community, so by rights, that's where you'd expect to look.

As well as focusing on the Australian condition, your work is also indebted to the history of architecture full stop! I mean there are eclectic elements in your work, so perhaps you are not just interested in establishing an Australian architecture, but also commenting on the wider world architectural scene?

Australians are Asians, though we don't want to face it. We are sitting out here on this island in the Pacific with a basic European cultural premise; I see no point in denying that. I'm extremely fond of the Germans. You can't turn your back on the Brits and the Germans. If there is something here, it's going to be a conglomerate – it will be some sort of synthesis of Europe and the U.S. on the edges of this land mass that still has us bluffed. I think we should be greedy about it.

The idiom you work with is that of the middle outer urban ring, suburban vernacular architecture. The sort of imagery your architecture projects, strongly reflects that. Would you agree with that?

Certainly! I'm committed to getting Australians to celebrate themselves. That might be the most useful thing I've got to say. The work takes in a range of influences and areas that normally, artistically, are deemed at best, to be less than serious and at worst, just plain bad taste, or kitsh. I'm keen to look carefully at *all* suburban context. At least it is ours.

As an architect, the work that I do has a basis in a visual world that is Melbourne. This is not simply the quaint old suburbs of Fitzroy, Richmond and Carlton, it's also in the wastelands, whether it be to the west or down to Dandenong. These environments have power. The office work is intended to find reverberations out there somewhere.

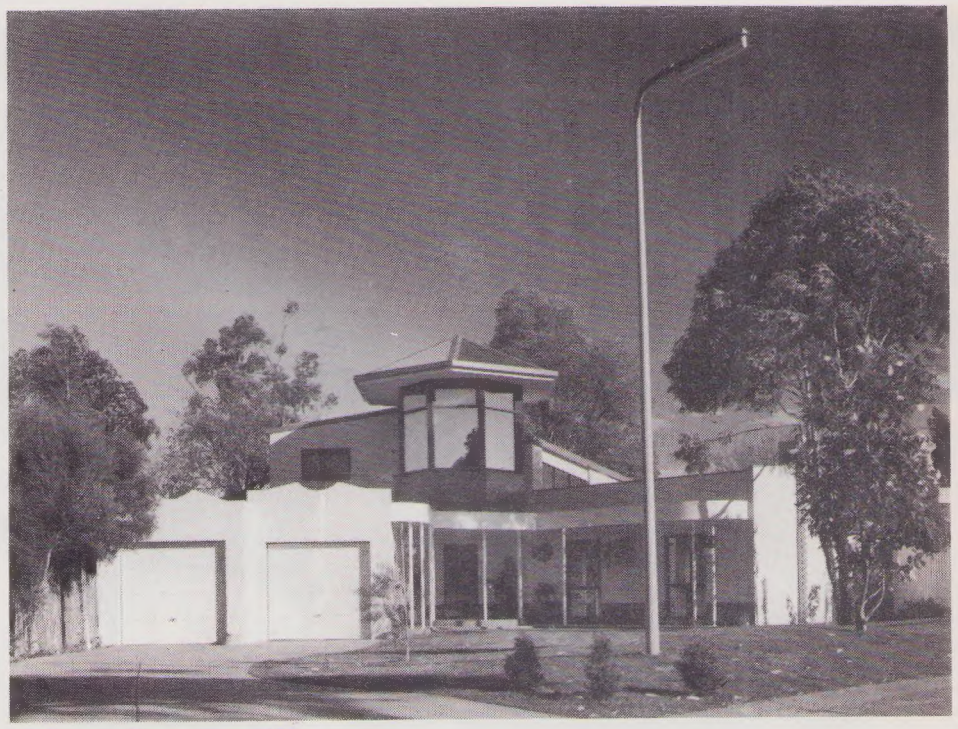
Do you think there is an element of satire in your work or possibly some people would even see it as being condescending?

All of my work is deadly earnest to the point of being ponderous. I find it rather confusing to be described as satiric – taking the micky out of the suburbs. It's certainly not my intention, if anything, the contrary is the case. I'm interested in the notion of beauty in the suburbs. Beauty seems to be an extremely elusive proposition in Australian cities. There is certainly little discussion about "beauty", everyone talks "ugly".

This is interesting because the reaction most people have to your work is that it is intentionally or appears to be, in bad taste or kitsh. I've never heard anyone say of your work that it's beautiful, and yet you seem to be interested in exploring beauty.

Well, I've been thinking about the idea of beauty for some time now. The idea of beauty in Australian cities and beauty in general in this country seems to be a difficult idea. It struck me however, that if I could simply commence to describe what I see as beautiful, not lyric, not poetic, but as pleasing or delightful to the eye. Well it became a Duchamp decision; simply change the rules.

Keysborough Primary School 1976. ▶



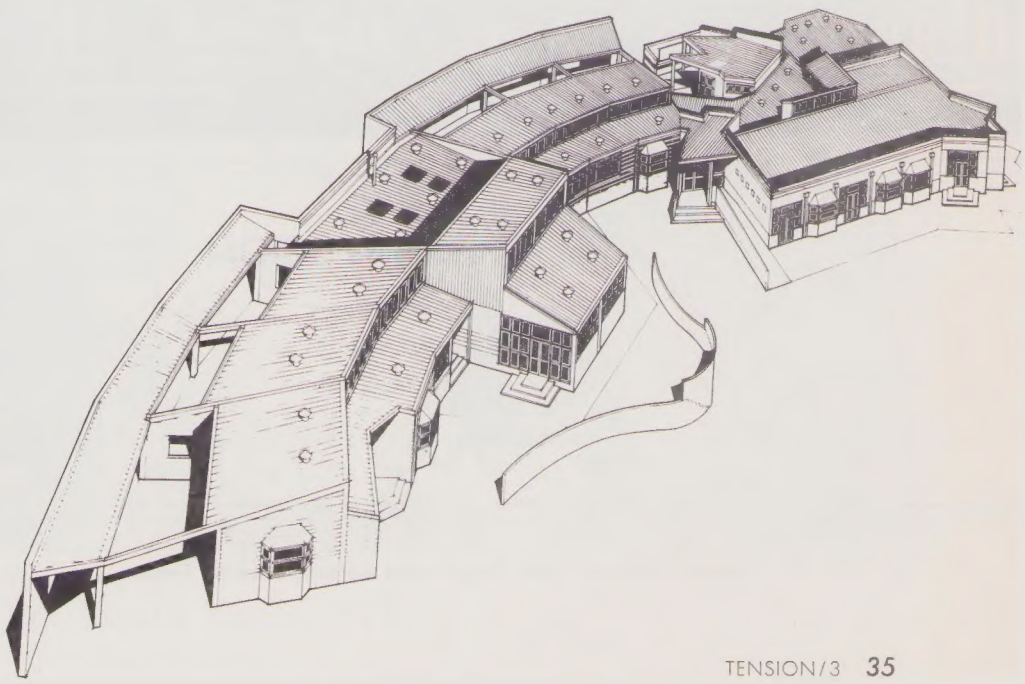
McCartney House, Kew, 1982.

Let's talk about the profession. How do you see yourself slotting into the profession. I mean, most professions are conservative institutions and it seems to me you haven't really allied yourself to the profession as such?

When I went through the University, we used to sit over in the pub and there was a general policy that if the Department liked your work, you used to go home and worry. If you got a very good mark, you would sit and ponder where you'd gone wrong. I think this now applies to the office work.

It has received an inordinate amount of publicity and an extraordinary number of Awards; to the point where the National Institute in Canberra is flying me around the country to address State Chapters. There is no doubt that most of my fellow professionals find the work that comes out of the office of Edmond and Corrigan irresponsible, slipshod and probably vaguely pink. Somehow it's cheating. I think some students, however, are interested in the ideas.

The senior fathers of the profession have found a niche for the office, and been extremely generous. I am reassured, but depressed, that this wave of enthusiasm is not showing at the cash register. We still have very little work. But in terms of the profession, I'm fond of everybody . . . ●



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Ashley Crawford

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Robin Barden

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Terence Hogan

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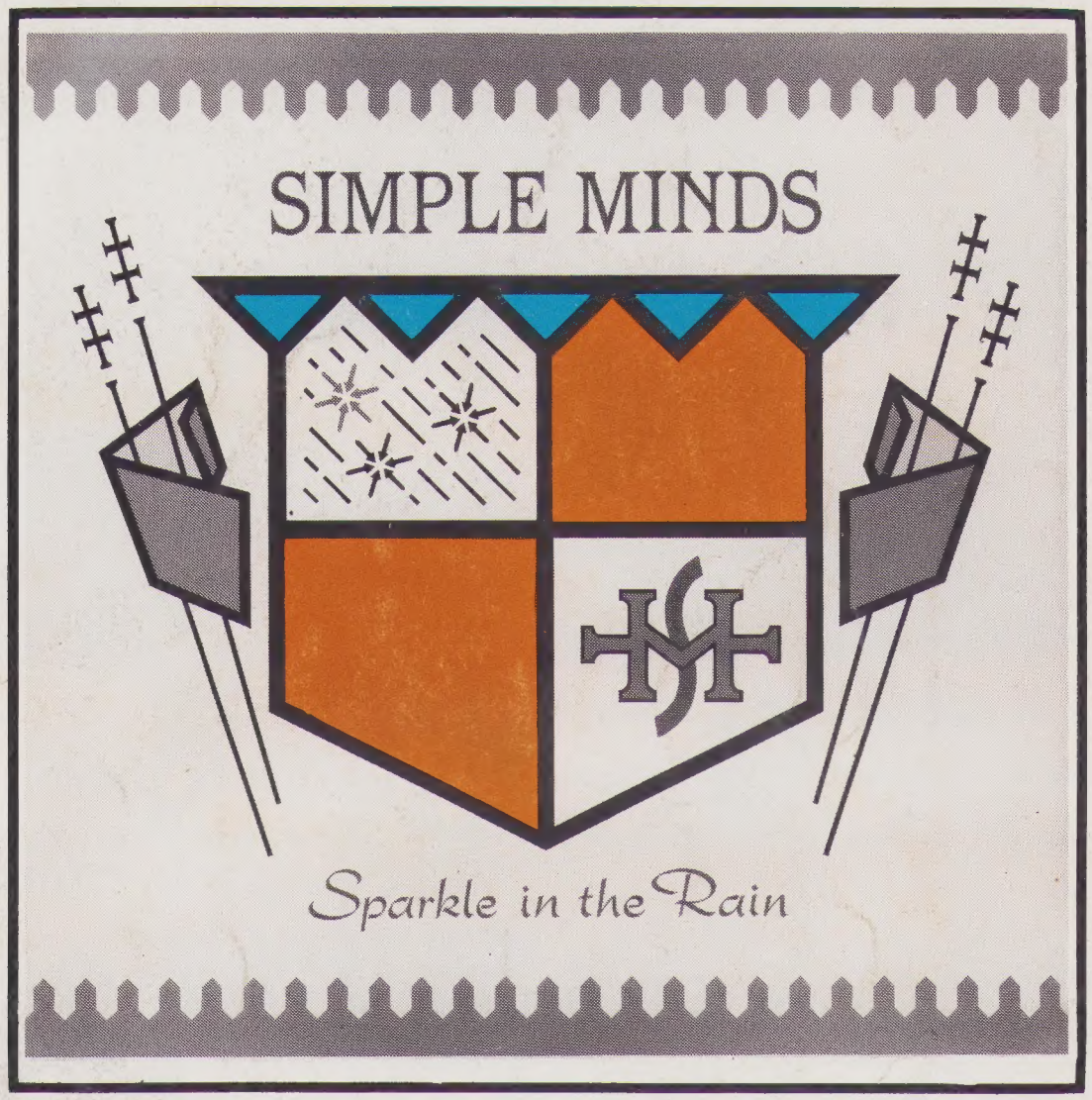

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